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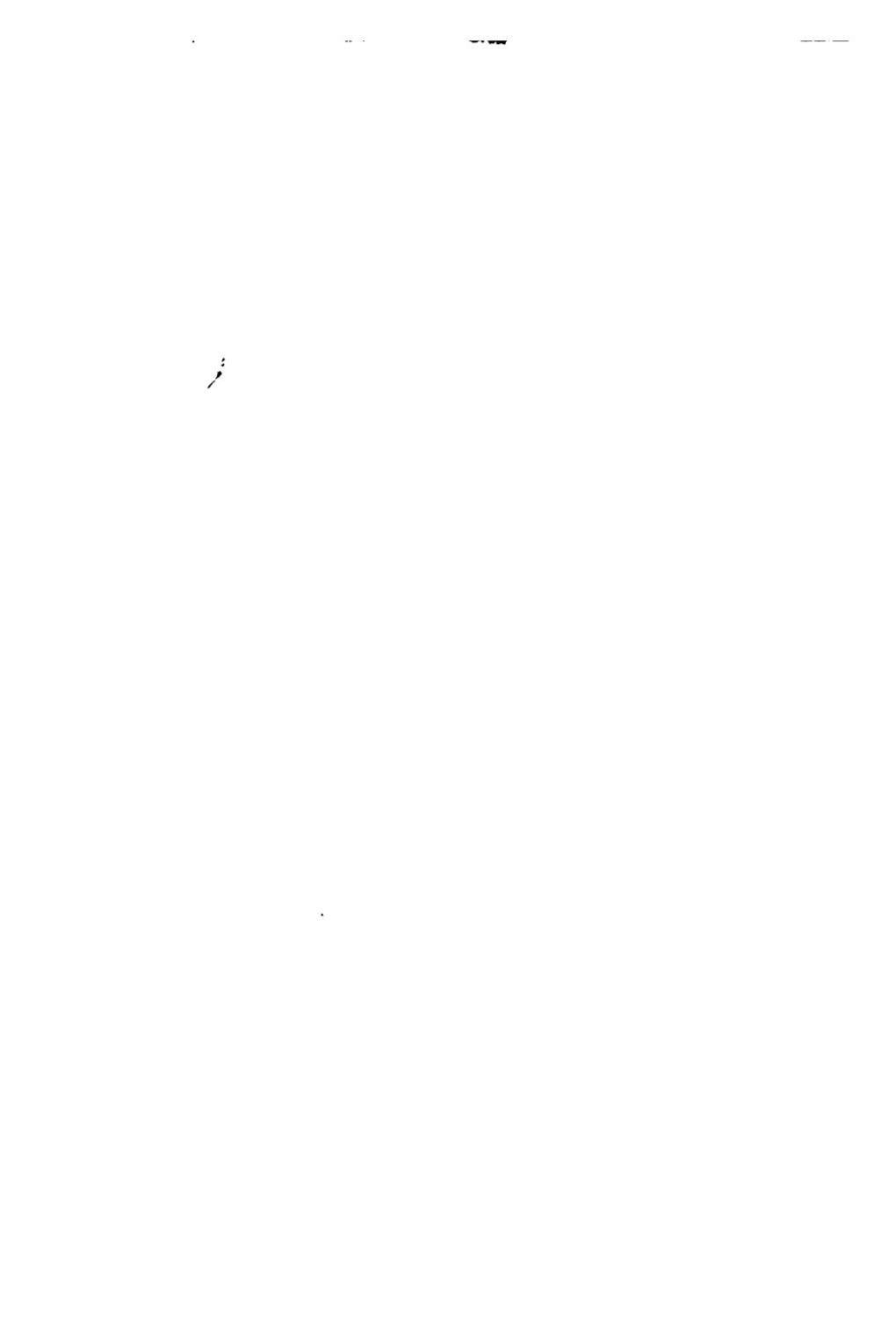
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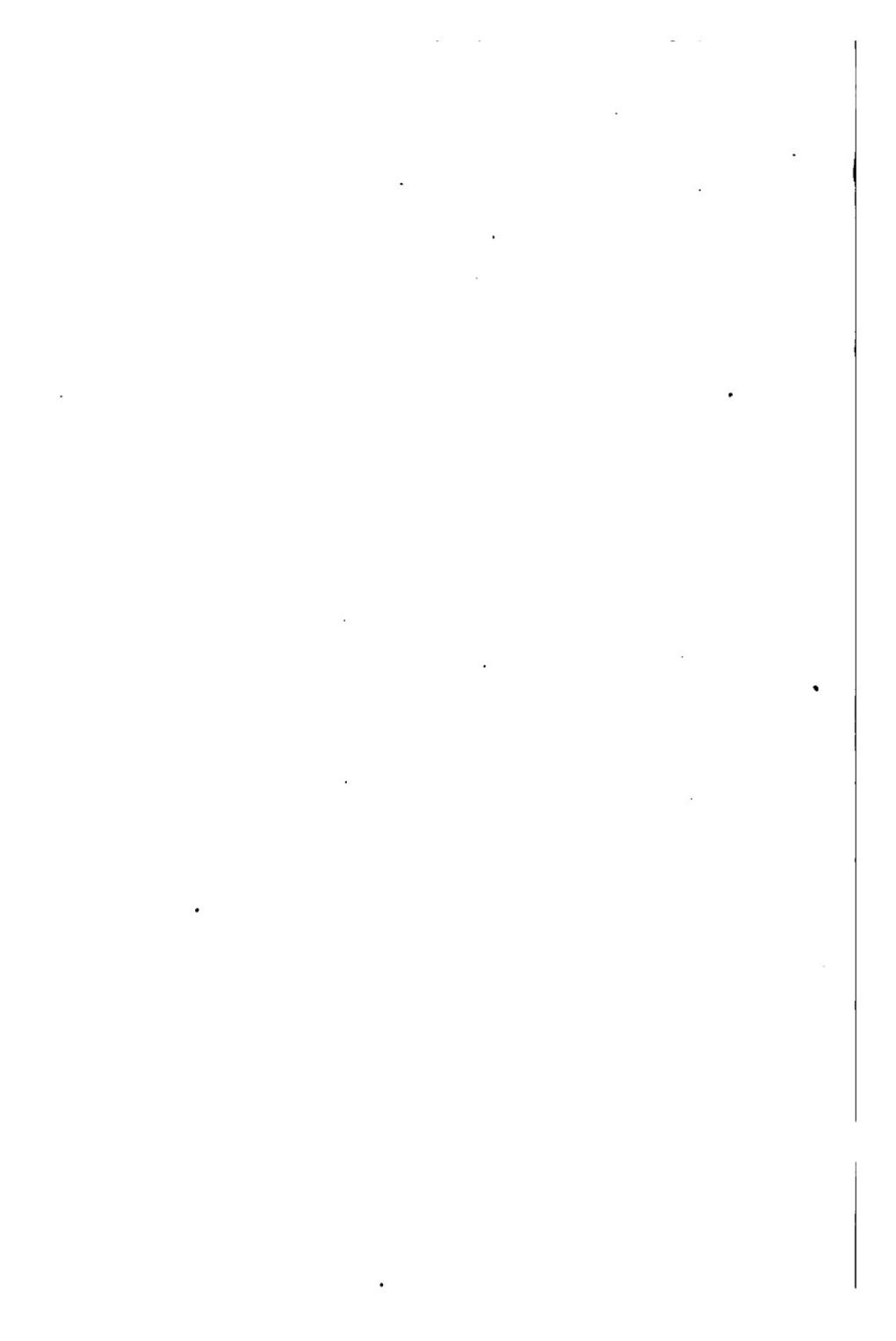
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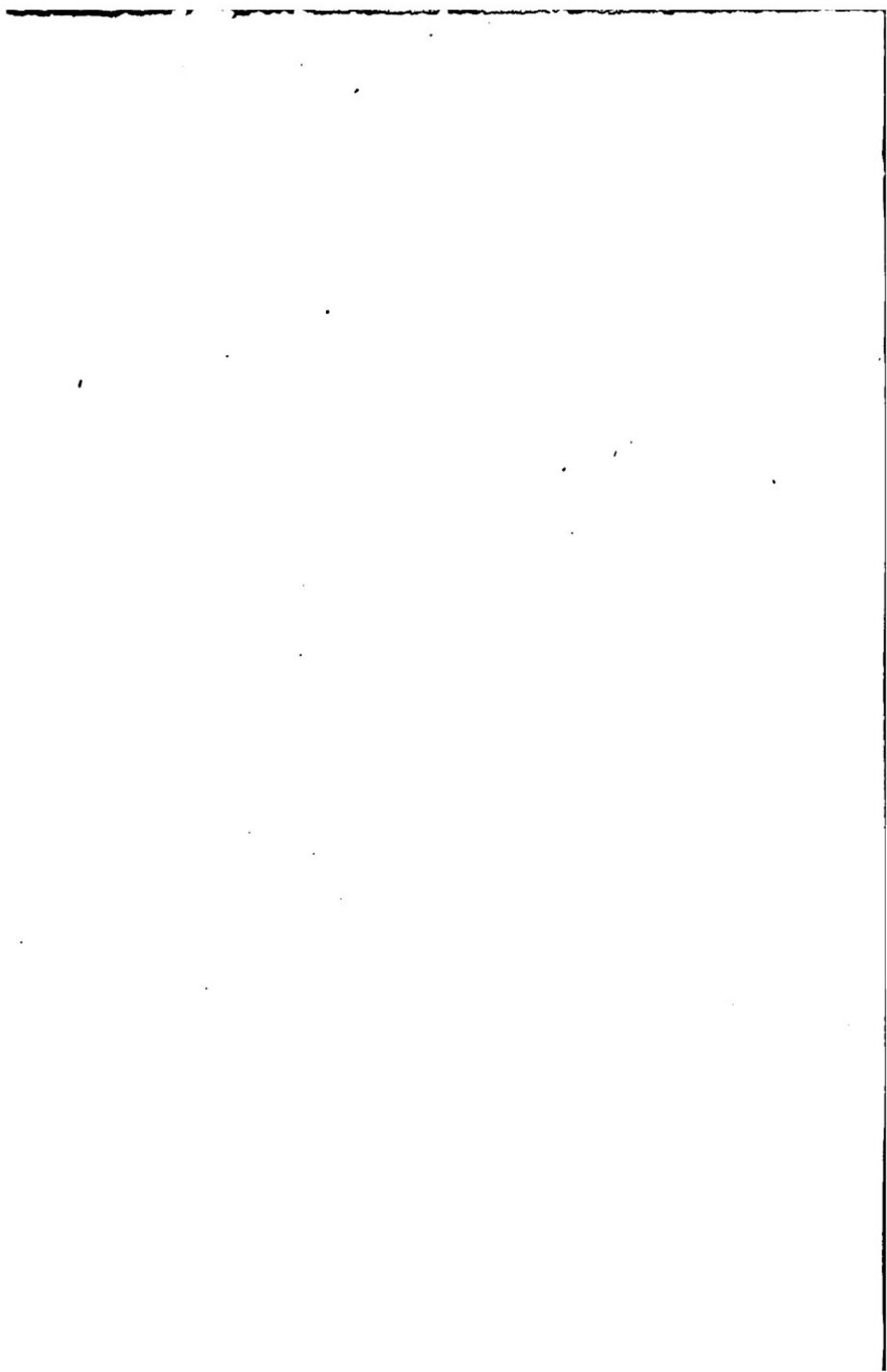
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THE BANNS OF MARRIAGE.



THE
BANNS OF MARRIAGE.

BY
DUTTON COOK.

AUTHOR OF
“*Young Mr. Nightingale*,” “*Hobson’s Choice*,” “*Paul Foster’s Daughter*,”
Etc. Etc.

In Two Volumes.

VOL. I.



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AN ENGAGED MAN.

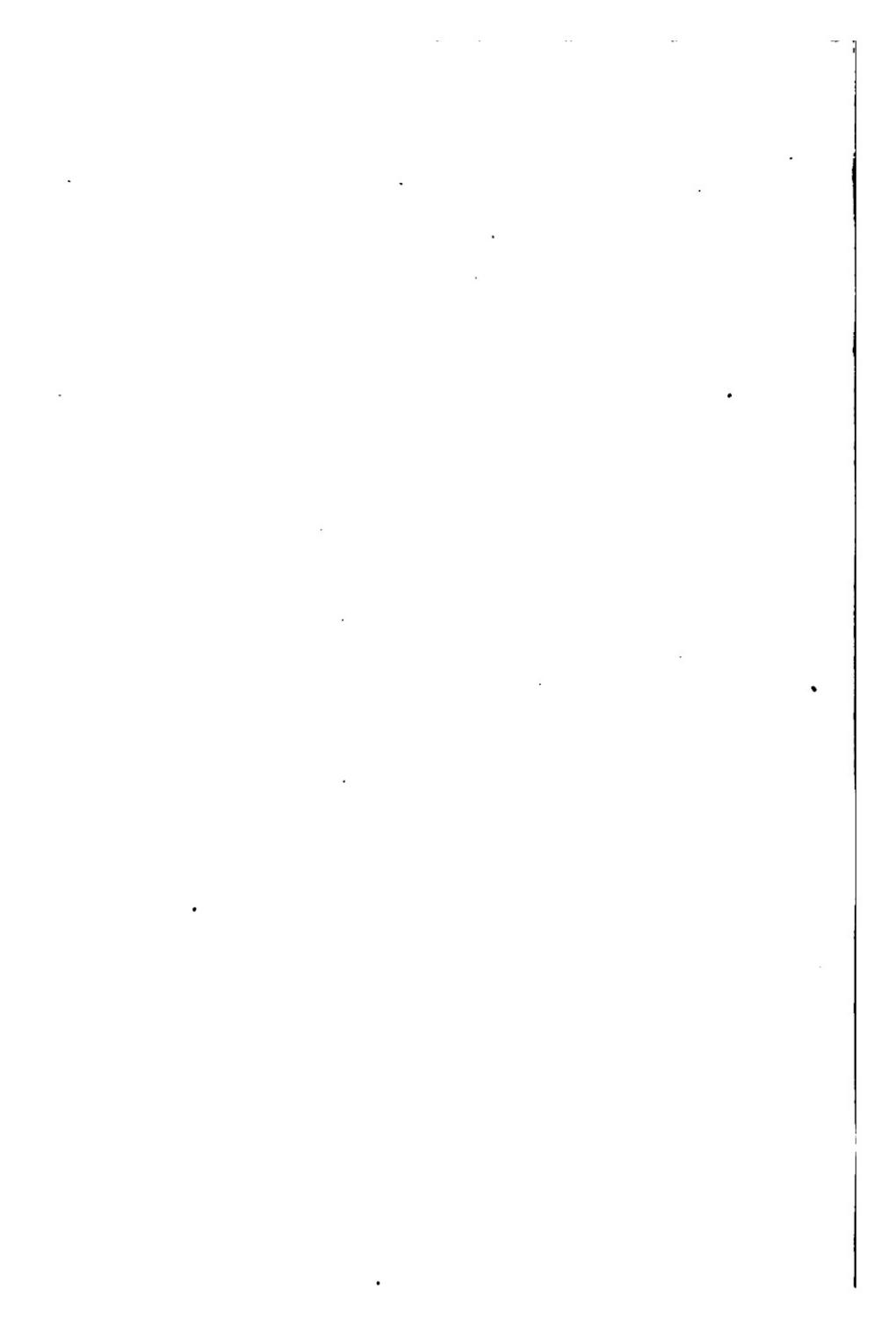
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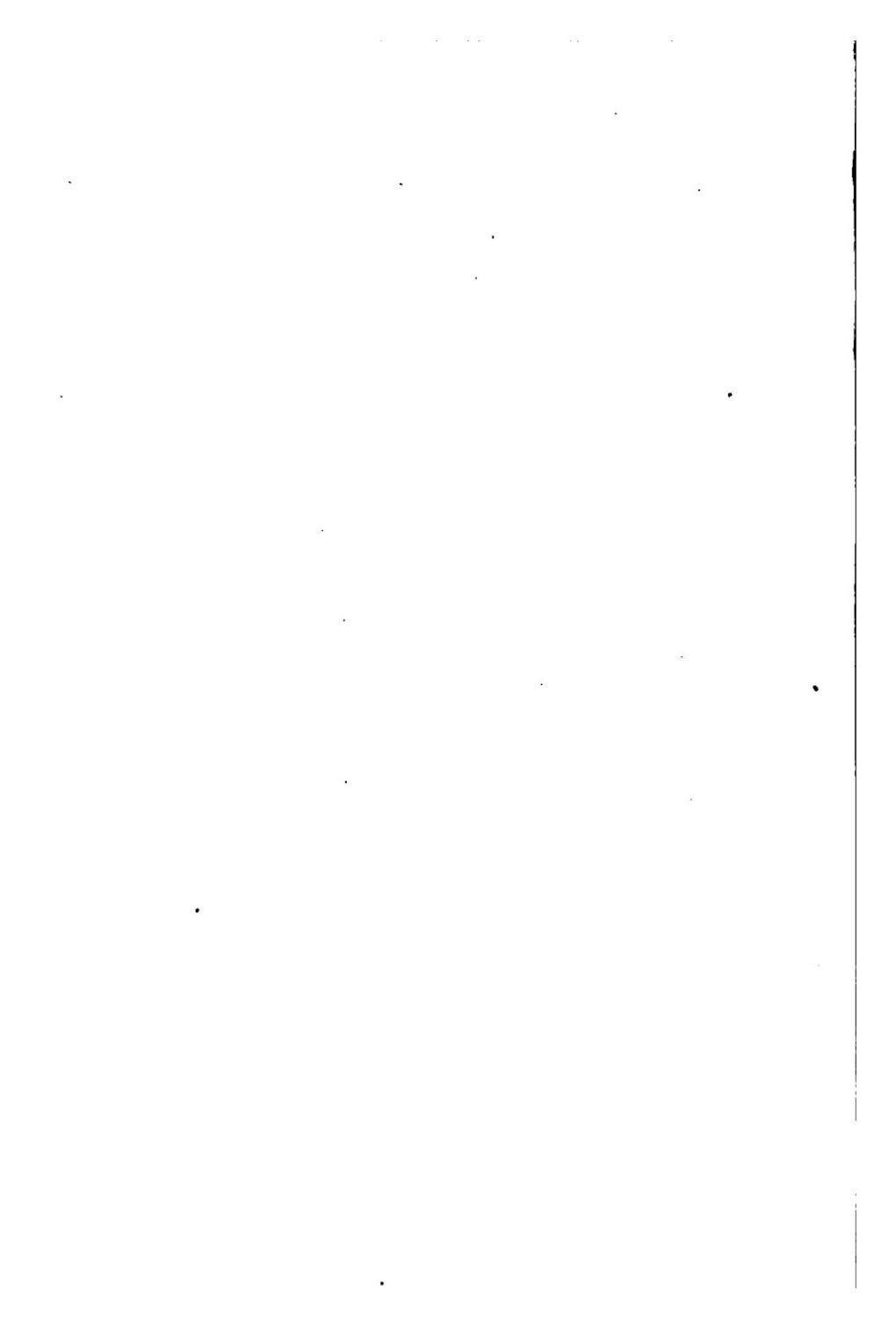
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the world generally. He knew the latest quotations of the markets, but he was also aware of the odds at the Corner—not that he was a betting-man, but because it was a pleasure to him to risk a pound or two on the more prominent events of the sporting world. He was not studious; a book other than an office-book he probably never opened from one year's end to the other; yet he read the newspapers with some diligence, and was a liberal patron of the comic journals. He liked laughter—and could laugh, especially after luncheon, upon small provocation. It was a sure way to James Snelgrove's regard to inform him of the newest joke current, or to add to his stock of conundrums: he was much given to conundrums.

His business life, it has been stated, was carried on in Fenchurch Street. Unofficially, he resided in a semi-detached villa in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. He was a married man; but he had not long entered the connubial state.

CHAPTER II.

"THE JOLLY ANGLERS."

MR. SNELGROVE's marriage came about in this wise. He had persuaded himself that it would be pleasant for once in a way to spend his annual vacation as an angler. He knew nothing of piscatorial sport; but it seemed to him to promise unfatiguing life in fresh air, and a fair measure of entertainment. He provided himself with all necessary equipments, therefore, and started for Barbel-le-Minnows, a pretty, well-watered, eastern-county village, famous for its fishing.

He sojourned at "The Jolly Anglers," a most cosy inn, with an excellent dry skittle-ground, kept by J. Mugson, licensed victualler—a genial host, his wife an admirable housewife and hostess. Mr. Snelgrove was made very welcome and com-

fortable at "The Jolly Anglers." He went out daily in a well-provisioned punt, and very nearly succeeded in catching—a sun-stroke. As a fisherman, he did not distinguish himself.

The weather was delightful—soft, sultry, with blue skies ; the thermometer stood high in the shade, and the atmosphere seemed almost to throb and glow with the heat. The little river Twill, which picturesquely intersects the village of Barbel-le-Minnows, dimpled and gurgled in the sunshine, as though it were beginning to simmer. Still it could boast its comparatively cool places, under the shadow of drooping willows and upshooting pollards, where it purred and prattled softly among its rushes, while a tangle of gnats flecked its surface, and here and there filibustering water-rats cruised, and scudded, and plunged, and threw its ripples into small commotions.

It was pleasant ; and that there was something to be said for angling, Mr. Snelgrove was prepared to concede ; still, it was a trifle dull—just a trifle. He did not absolutely wish himself back again in Fenchurch Street ; but it occurred to him now

and then that he might have employed his vacation more judiciously. He was disposed to make the best of his position, however.

Heat induces thirst. The parched land, cracking all over into a network of mouths, craves rain. Perspiring man demands drink ; and, having money to pay for it, obtains it. Mr. Snelgrove found the old ale at "The Jolly Anglers" delightful. The place was famous for its old ale—sound, sparkling, and certainly heady.

Mr. Snelgrove drank freely of the ale. When you've nothing to do, drinking is a sort of resource. And he also took to cider-cup. The barmaid of the inn was well skilled in the preparation of that refreshment. Mr. Snelgrove was particular as to the ingredients of the beverage, and liked to see it compounded ; so he and the barmaid—her name was Eliza Hobbs—came together.

Eliza had for some time been an object of admiration to the patrons of "The Jolly Anglers." She was, without doubt, a pretty woman ; indeed, prettiness on so large a scale as hers could fairly claim to be called handsomeness.

When Snelgrove first saw her, he thought at once of Norma and Semiramis, as he had seen those heroines represented by singers of majestic mould on the boards of the Opera-house. There was a sort of solid queenliness in her every movement; even in her manner of pumping old ale into a pewter measure, or stirring a rummer of punch, there was a surprising stateliness. A sculptor would have joyed to model her arms: a pavior might have envied their muscular strength and proportions.

Her features were regular and well formed; a certain tendency to development of flesh in the region of the mouth and jaw being perhaps a trifling blemish in the shapeliness of her countenance; rather because of the probability of its becoming exaggerated by Time—the crudest caricaturist of facial defects—than that at present it was much “out of drawing,” as artists say. When Mr. Snelgrove first encountered Eliza Hobbs she was but twenty-two—a really magnificent young woman. If Juno had ever condescended to perform the duties of a barmaid, the goddess

so occupied would have looked much as Eliza Hobbs looked at the bar of "The Jolly Anglers."

Let it be stated—as we have referred to a heathen divinity who entertained views of morality peculiar to her class—that Eliza was a young person of most exemplary character.

Admiration she excited on all sides. The bar of "The Jolly Anglers" was thronged with her suitors or *quasi-suitors*; her personal charms were famous for miles and miles round Barbel-le-Minnows; yet never had the breath of scandal tarnished the good name of Eliza Hobbs. Mr. and Mrs. Mugson were prepared to certify that a better-conducted young woman, or one more thoroughly acquainted with her business, they had never met; and they had been in what is called "the public line" for long years, and had known, as they said, "a many barmaids."

"She never forgot herself," as they expressed it. She stood at the bar to retail the liquors of the establishment, and in some degree, no doubt, to stimulate their consumption. She performed those functions consummately. She was in no

way to be persuaded to deviate from the strict pathway of her duty. Admiration was agreeable to her, of course. To what woman, or, for the matter of that, what man either, is it not agreeable? But the admirer who did not require the frequent replenishing of his glass, who was not at the bar on business, passing his coin across it in exchange for its refreshments, found little consideration from her. It was, in fact, of small avail to hunger for her love, if you did not also thirst for the liquors of "The Jolly Anglers."

Intellectual she was not. Her large liquid ox-eyes were beautiful objects, but they bespeak no great mental brightness. Nor did she possess much education. Still she was endowed with conversational powers to some extent; quite sufficient for her station. Hers was not the giggling, prattling, saucy manner of many of her sister barmaids. Frivolous attractiveness of that character would have been unworthy of a woman of her face, and figure, and inches; yet she could interchange talk, fairly sensible and animated, with

the inn's customers. Indubitably, however, her looks constituted her strong point.

Mr. Snelgrove saw, admired, and—what with the heat of the weather, a tendency to sun-stroke, the strength of the old ale, and the deliciousness of the cider-cup, prepared by Eliza's own hands—loved her. If he had been a wise man, he would forthwith have packed up his traps, and returned to Fenchurch Street. If he had been a wicked man, he would perhaps have loved on, without, so to say, pleading his suit through a wedding-ring. Being neither particularly wise nor especially wicked, he—well, to be short, he married Eliza Hobbs.

Frequenter of the inn, who were to be described not so much as lovers as "loafers," had been occupied in watching the progress of this love-affair. They wagered amongst themselves as to whether Snelgrove—they called him shortly, *Snel*—meant wedlock or not. It was at last understood to be even betting as to whether Eliza's husband would be Mr. Snelgrove or a certain Tom Blacklock, the village farrier, who for some

time had been paying court to Miss Hobbs with much assiduity.

James Snelgrove was destined to be the happy man, however. The marriage ceremony was celebrated early one morning, and very quietly indeed, at the little church of Barbel-le-Minnows.

The fact of the marriage was kept a secret from the members of Mr. Snelgrove's family—the Snelgroves of Liverpool, Calcutta, Shanghae, Yokohama, &c. He was not proud of having married a barmaid. He knew that the world would say he had married beneath him; and that his kindred would especially blame him for the step he had taken; so he told them nothing about it. He did not want to offend them for many reasons. Still, he loved his Eliza. He took for her a pleasant semi-detached villa in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park; and for a while he did not regret his marriage.

Not very long after his union, however, Mr. Snelgrove discovered that his wife possessed what is known as "a temper." It should hardly have surprised him, because it has for some time been

a notorious fact that very many women do possess "tempers." Does the possession militate much against their charms? Hardly. Perhaps even the angels have tempers. Who knows?

Still Mr. Snelgrove had not been prepared for the vehement form in which his wife's temper was occasionally apt to demonstrate itself. He had not sufficiently taken into account that her placid impassive demeanour in the bar of "The Jolly Anglers" owed something to official considerations.

Matrimony had disposed of these, and given scope for the manifestation of her proper nature; and two suspicions took root in her bosom, and attained luxuriant growth: she was haunted by the notion that her husband was ashamed of her and of his marriage with her; and she permitted herself to be persistently jealous of him.

He *was* a little ashamed of her, to tell the truth—the first fires of his love abating and steadyng. Assuredly, she had appeared to more advantage as a barmaid in the fishing-village than as a tea-broker's wife in the Regent's Park villa.

He was not himself a man of much cultivation, or refinement of feeling or of manner; still he could not but be sensible that his wife was not his equal, but pertained to a different class—entertained dissimilar views, and tastes, and sentiments. He *did* shrink a little from being seen abroad with her—from introducing her to his friends, from giving more publicity to his marriage than he could possibly avoid; and not solely on prudential grounds—from fear of shocking or offending his relatives, the rich seniors of the Snelgrove family. Her ideas of the ladylike in dress—now that she could put from her the simple muslins and merinos of barmaid life—were certainly garish and exuberant; and somehow, out of doors, with his wife on his arm, he was troubled with a mistrust that she did not look like his wife, and that the world would not give him or her credit for such being really the case. Her suspicions as to his want of fidelity were absurdly groundless.

Still he loved her; and in a way, and at times, was proud of her. After all, it was something to

think that so large a sum of physical wealth and charm was really his—secured to him for ever by the mere recital of the brief service in the Prayer-book. Only, he had not calculated upon her bringing quite so much of the barmaid into her married life. She took pains and pride in the preservation and garnishing of the home he had provided for her, and carried this to an excess he found vexatious. He meant her to be the mistress of the establishment: she became a sort of superior servant in it. He had not counted upon his wife's undertaking personally so much dusting, cleaning, and cooking. He had forgotten the antecedents of Mrs. Snelgrove. She had no resources or pursuits other than were almost of a menial sort. He hated to see his wife hurrying to and fro with a broom or a duster. But she *would* do it; and she *could* not understand objection on his part to her proceedings.

He *did* bring up a friend or two to the villa—his close intimates: Perkins of the Stock Exchange, and Plimpton, the sugar-broker, for instance. They were entertained one Sunday, and no pains were

spared to welcome them and celebrate the occasion. The result was not a success. They voted, as they quitted the house, that "Snelgrove was a right-down good sort of fellow; but they couldn't stand Mrs. S. A fine woman, but—Poor old Jemmy!"

She had not made herself very agreeable—had not appeared to advantage—though she had cooked the dinner with her own hands, and it was excellent. But after the manner of some wives, she was jealous of the friends of her husband's bachelor days, and had failed to make herself agreeable to them. She regarded them with a sort of retrospective jealousy. They had known her husband before she did—knew him better altogether, perhaps: and she hated them accordingly.

CHAPTER III.

DEBATE AND DIVISION.

WHEN one morning at breakfast-time Mr. Snelgrove informed his wife that he regretted he could not, as he had engaged to do, take her that day to the Great Kotzwara Festival at the Crystal Palace, in consequence of his presence being pressingly required elsewhere, she said with some acridity that she had fully expected as much, and that *that was* always the way with him. When he assured her that he could not help it, she replied that she was certain he did it on purpose. When he stated, in explanation, that it was indispensably necessary for him to serve on a grand-jury at the Clerkenwell Sessions House, she said, “Rubbish!” When he produced the summons he had received, and endeavoured to make her understand its imperative

nature, she averred that he never took her anywhere, and without doubt was ashamed to be seen out of doors with his wife. He told her to read the summons for herself: she tore it in fragments. He declared that she was a foolish woman for her pains: she burst into tears. He observed that crying was no use: and she called him a brute.

Mr. Snelgrove stirred his tea, and held his peace. He felt that the discussion was closed; at any rate, he would add no more to it. Presently, however, it was resumed, but in a more subdued way. Mrs. Snelgrove said tearfully: "You know, James, you need not go to this jury, or whatever you call it."

"My dear, I must." Mr. Snelgrove's tone was decisive.

"You didn't attend the last time you were summoned." (By-the-by, Mrs. Snelgrove preferred to employ the term *summons-ed*.)

"That's the very reason why I must go this time."

Mrs. Snelgrove drummed upon the table until she made all the bread-crumbs dance.

"But, whatever *is* the use of a grand-jury, James?" she demanded presently. "No use at all —you know it isn't."

"My dear, I've nothing to do with that."

So far as he had an opinion upon the subject, Mr. Snelgrove was inclined to agree with his wife, and to hold that the grand-jury system of the country was about as utterly futile and preposterous an arrangement as could well be conceived. Very many people, it may be noted, are of a similar way of thinking. It is to be said, of course, that Mr. and Mrs. Snelgrove knew little, and understood less, about the grand-jury system of the country. Very many people are in like case.

Still, it was clear that a debate upon the advantages of grand-juries, abstractly considered, could serve no sort of useful purpose upon the present occasion. Mr. Snelgrove had promised to take his wife to the Crystal Palace. Then there had been served upon him a summons to attend the Sessions House. What was he to do? Should he take his wife to Sydenham, and defy the summons? Or should he obey the summons, and disappoint Mrs. Snelgrove?

It was a difficult matter to decide. He felt that, through no fault of his own, he was placed in a dilemma. Disregard of the summons *might* entail upon him a fine; disappointment of his wife would very certainly kindle her wrath. It was true, as he had urged, that on previous occasions he had neglected his duties as a grand-juryman, and with impunity. But then, as he had stated, *that* was rather an argument for his obedience to the present mandate. It was not likely that he would always be allowed to escape service and pay no penalties.

He was liberally disposed, and money was no great object to him. Still, he was decidedly a man of business. He liked to have an adequate return in some shape for his disbursements. He by no means objected to expenditure, even of a profuse nature, provided he got something for it—though it might be something so unprofitable as pleasure of the most vacuous kind. But to waste good solid gold in a fine at the Sessions House—he could not stand that. At the mere thought, he buttoned up his pockets; or, rather, he would have done so, if

buttons to pockets had then been in fashion—they were not.

“We must go to the Palace some other day,” he said.

“Yes; when there’s no one there,” Mrs. Snelgrove observed petulantly. “I understand; some day when there isn’t a festival.”

“If it comes to that, we neither of us care so very much about Kotzwara, that I know of,” avowed Mr. Snelgrove. “For my part, I own I had never even heard of him until a little while ago.”

It need hardly be stated that Mr. Snelgrove was not a musical amateur of any great pretence or cultivation. The great Kotzwara’s sonata, *The Battle of Prague*, was to be performed at Sydenham with a score of military bands, many real soldiers, and much gunpowder. Hand-grenades were to be thrown at intervals about the grounds. No pains were to be spared in the way of carrying out and illustrating the intentions of the composer.

“But it’s just like you, James. I never set my heart upon anything, but you try to fling cold water upon it directly.”

"Of course," said Mr. Snelgrove. His acquiescence seemed to provoke Mrs. Snelgrove gravely.

She rose with angry eyes and stirred herself : "James, you shan't go to this jury,—that's flat."

Thereupon he determined that he would certainly do his duty as a grand-juryman. If he had entertained any doubt upon the subject, he would doubt no longer ; he could not—as a man, albeit a husband—after being addressed like that.

"Don't be absurd, Eliza," he said coolly.

He too rose from the breakfast-table ; and he brushed the crumbs from the creases of his waist-coat.

"And that new bonnet I bought on purpose!" said Mrs. Snelgrove with a sigh.

(She preferred to say "a purpose.")

"Well, I daresay it will remain in fashion for a few days longer."

"That's right; sneer at me; that's the way with you men. A woman does her best to look her best, and dress her best, and be a credit to you—so that you shouldn't think her a dowdy, and feel ashamed of seeing her on your arm—and *this* is how she is

treated ! I wouldn't have believed it of you, James!"

"I daresay not," observed Mr. Snelgrove with provoking placidity.

"You never loved me, that's the truth ; you never cared a bit about me !" cried Mrs. Snelgrove.

"Of course not," replied the husband : "that's the reason I married you; that's why I brought you here, and surrounded you with every comfort, not to say luxury, and did all I could to make you happy—all because I didn't love you: you may be quite sure of that."

Mr. Snelgrove's ironical speech was a mistake. No woman ever yet did understand irony. Mrs. Snelgrove was no exception to this rule. She sobbed afresh, with added impetuosity and increase of noise.

"I knew it; I've said so all along ; I was a fool to think otherwise. Why couldn't you leave me in peace ? I was happy enough before I met you; and—and I might have married some—some one else—who'd—who'd have loved me better, and treated me kinder!"

Mrs. Snelgrove spoke with difficulty. Excitement interfered with her articulation.

"Well, it's too late to think about that now," Mr. Snelgrove observed philosophically. "We're married, and we had better make the best of it. If it was a mistake ——"

"You *do* regret it, then!" his wife exclaimed with a start, and much sudden firmness of voice. She suspended her tears for the moment; they were, so to say, dried up by the fire of the anger which now possessed her. "I knew it; I was certain of it. You hate me; you loathe me—and—you love some other woman!"

"Don't be foolish, Eliza!"

"Don't 'Eliza' me! I'm ashamed of you, James. You've no heart; you've no feeling. How can I believe this story about a summons! Very likely it's all a trick. It's a planned thing, no doubt. You don't want to take me to the Crystal Palace, because you want to take some one else instead. *I know you!*"

Mr. Snelgrove tossed his head contemptuously. He felt the accusation to be so egregious that

he could not trust himself to reply to it in words.

"James!" Mrs. Snelgrove's changes of mood were apt to be somewhat abrupt. She fell upon her husband's neck weeping terribly. "You do love me, James, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"A little?"

"A great deal, if you like."

"James!"

"There, there; that will do, Eliza." Mr. Snelgrove spoke rather testily. His wife's exuberant emotions were inconvenient and perplexing. Indeed, they had tended to the crumpling of his shirt-front, and otherwise to the detriment of his usual trimness of aspect.

"Don't leave me, James; don't be unkind to me."

"I'm not unkind to you."

"It isn't much I ask of you. Take me to the Palace."

"Some other day? Certainly."

"No; to-day: you promised you'd take me to-day. You *promised!*"

"I couldn't foresee that this confounded summons would disturb my arrangements. *Do* be reasonable."

"James!" Mrs. Snelgrove renewed her manifestations of fondness for her lord. They were a little ill-timed. She was not a woman of very acute perception, or she would have apprehended as much. She would have seen, too, that Mr. Snelgrove's mind was made up; that he had quite determined to attend the Sessions House, and *not* to take her to Sydenham. Indeed, the plan of her campaign had been altogether ill devised. She had opposed her husband until she had roused the obstinacy natural to him, as to a good many other men. She had offended his pride, and ruffled his sense of dignity. She had commenced imperiously, and then had tried the effect of a more coaxing and caressing line of argument. Possibly a reversal of this order of proceeding would have been more successful. It was now, in some sort, a point of honour with Mr. Snelgrove to stand firm, and to resist his wife's solicitings. He bore her embrace with disheartening stoicism.

Mrs. Snelgrove abandoned her attitude of weakness and supplication. She drew herself up. She stood five feet six even without her high heels, and was certainly what is known popularly as "a fine figure of a woman"—and thrust her husband from her with an abruptness that was not without an element of violence.

"*That's* what a man's promise is worth, then ! *This* is how a GENTLEMAN"—here she laid portentous emphasis—"keeps his word ! But it's like you, just. It's you all over, James. You never intended to take me—never from the first. I know you never did. I knew it directly the words were out of your mouth. Did I ask you to take me ? No ! Do I ever ask you to take me anywhere ? Did I ever wish to put you to unnecessary expense ? Haven't I slaved and slaved for you ? I should like to know who has a more comfortable home—or one cleaner—or better kept" (she said *kep*)—"or has his victuals nicer cooked, and served punctual to the moment, and all at a cheaper rate than you, James Snelgrove ! I'd have gone and scrubbed with my own hands every board

and stone in the place, sooner than you should have had to complain of its not being fit and sightly enough for you. Have I ever spared myself, or cared for myself, or thought of myself, when your comfort's been in question, James Snelgrove? You know I never have—and *this* is the return I get! I'm not a gad-about—I never was one. I'm not a woman for ever bent on pleasure-seeking, as some is. Perhaps I should be more thought of if I had been. It's little enough pleasure I ever ask for, or ever get, for the matter of that. I didn't think, when I married, it was to become the slave of a tyrant. But that's what I'm to consider myself for the future, it seems." Much more to the same effect, and indulging in much iteration, after the manner of angry speakers, Mrs. Snelgrove poured forth clamorously and with passionate volubility. She paused at length, rather from lack of breath than deficiency in matter for speech.

Her husband, as soon as opportunity for observation was permitted him, bade her to keep her temper ("Temper!" she echoed fiercely), and

be reasonable (" Reasonable ! "), and not talk nonsense (" Nonsense ! ").

" I'm not to be allowed to speak, I suppose : you'll have me gagged next."

" My dear, do you want the whole neighbourhood to hear you ? "

She declared that she did not care who heard her ; and in proof of her assertion, raised her voice still more. It must be said that the lady was now almost bawling.

" I'm not afraid of being overheard. I've done nothing, and said nothing, to be ashamed of. I don't care if all the world knows how cruelly you've used me. And you call yourself a *man*—a GENTLEMAN ! I shall *not* hold my tongue, James ; I shall **NOT** hold my tongue!"

Mr. Snelgrove had maintained his composure very fairly. He felt grieved and vexed, and looked a little angry : it was not surprising ; his situation was assuredly a painful one.

" Come, come, we've had quite enough of this : not a word more, Eliza," he said, and he turned on his heel. He had spoken with considerable

sharpness, and for a moment there was something of a lull in the storm. But Mrs. Snelgrove was not in a mood for silence or peace.

Presently she was screaming forth afresh: "I would not go to Sydenham with you now—no, not if you were to go down on your bended knees, and beg and implore me to—I wouldn't."

"I'm not at all likely to do anything so absurd."

This was a rude speech, perhaps; but the provocation had been great; and there were limits to the patience of Mr. Snelgrove, as of other husbands.

He prepared to quit the house. Then occurred a very distressing scene. I will describe it with all the brevity possible. She barred his egress; she snatched his gloves from him; she flung his hat on the floor, and crushed it with her foot (a beautiful glossy new hat—Snelgrove had ever been daintily inclined in regard to his hats: it was a cruel, wanton sacrifice); she confiscated his umbrella.

He escaped at last, wearing a wide-awake—

his garden hat; he had snatched it from its peg in the hall. He escaped with much loss of dignity and injury to his wardrobe, rumpled and dishevelled, with torn wristbands, twisted neck-tie, and, I regret to say, scratched hands.

She screamed after him voluble vixenish abuse and opprobrious epithets.

"And mind," she added, "I *will* go to the Palace, if I go by myself!"

"You may go"—Mr. Snelgrove cried angrily; but the closing of the street door with a fierce bang hindered the completion of the sentence. It cannot be stated, therefore, whether Mr. Snelgrove gave permission to his wife to proceed.

Flushed and irritated—chafing under a sense of injury and degradation—it was a comfort to Mr. Snelgrove to find himself alone in the street out of earshot of his wife's objurgations.

"The woman's a perfect"—he paused, and then said "torment." Perhaps he had originally contemplated a stronger expression.

He was victorious, in that so far he had ob-

tained his own way ; yet he did not feel inclined to exult in his victory ; because he was well assured that so wretched a conflict ought never to have taken place. At the same time, he couldn't admit that he had been at all to blame in the matter.

It had been a most unseemly, shameful business. Still it was over—for *the present* ; and he was free—free to do his duty to his country as a grand-juryman ! It was not much, he felt, to have struggled so hotly for. And would not the struggle recommence—be continued ?

He called a cab, and was driven to the Sessions House. On his way, he bought a hat (presenting his wide-awake to the gratified cabman), and in some degree rectified his disturbed toilet.

Left alone, Mrs. Snelgrove wept copiously ; then she rang the bell for the breakfast-things to be cleared away. The handmaiden, looking scared and inquisitive—for of course the tumult in the breakfast-parlour had penetrated the kitchen regions of the house, and occasioned due excitement there—performed her task but clumsily. She

received from her mistress as hearty a scolding as she had ever been visited with during her whole experience of domestic service.

Presently, stirred by a sudden impulse, with a jealous inflamed face, Mrs. Snelgrove sent for a cab, and followed her husband. She examined the fragments of the summons, to inform herself on the subject, and drove to the Sessions House.

Was she the more satisfied or disconcerted? She was enabled, after payment of a small fee to an usher, to perceive her husband, with some fifteen others, duly seated in court, listening to the charge of the judge.

She was too excited to hear much of this, or to understand aught of what she heard. It was clear, however, that her James had not deceived her—that there was no cause whatever for her jealousy of him, or her imputations in regard to his good faith. He was really doing his duty as a grand-juryman; he had not taken another in her place to Sydenham. But that he was quite capable of so doing, she was still prepared

to maintain ; for she was still nursing her wrath, and she kept it very warm.

Moreover, she was angry—very angry—that, so far as she could see, so little cause really existed for her anger.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE JURY.

LISTENING to the grave and measured tones in which the judge delivered his charge to the grand-jury, watching his wise face and impressive manner the while, you would have thought he really believed all he said. Histrionic ability abounds in British courts of law. He informed the jury that they were now required, by the legislature of their country, to discharge certain of the gravest duties which could devolve upon the citizens of any state. No mean trust was now in their hands, no light responsibility rested upon their shoulders. They were called upon to aid in the vindication of the majesty of the law—to perform functions of vast historical interest, of which experience had proved the worth, and which time had, so to speak,

invested with a kind of sanctity. He did not doubt, however, that with the intelligence he could perceive they possessed, and with the diligence he was convinced they would exercise, they would achieve the task intrusted to them completely to the satisfaction of their grateful countrymen. They would carefully examine the bills that would be submitted to them, and pronounce upon them in accordance with the terms of their oaths. They would sift and scrutinise the evidence, and find that the bills were true, or ignore them, as the circumstances of each case might lead them in their discretion to determine; and so on. It sounded like wisdom. Perhaps the judge himself thought it so. Time, perhaps, had taken the edge off his appreciative skill in such respect—for he was an octogenarian. He was a gifted elocutionist, however. He could have made speeches in his sleep—perfect in manner, beautifully rounded as to paragraphs, if perhaps a little inane in regard to matter. He dozed much on the bench; he was in a comatose state when he tried half the causes that came before him. Still, he was admitted on all

hands to be an admirable judge—albeit it was also conceded that he was certainly in his dotes.

If the judge played his part well—elevating farce to the dignity of poetic tragedy—Mr. Snelgrove's small share in the performance was executed but indifferently. He was listless, sullen, abstracted. Indeed, he rather resembled a supernumerary oppressed with doubts about his salary being paid, than a recognised member of a theatrical company acting with an eye to distinction and professional fame.

For Mr. Snelgrove's meditations were pre-occupied. He was thinking about himself—his wife—his quarrel with her. He was brooding over the past—looking gloomily towards the future; wondering how it would end; and deciding that, upon the whole, he had, so to say, made rather a mess of his life.

No very active duties were required of him, however—he was only one of a chorus. He sat with pen, ink, and writing-paper before him, and acquiesced in all the proceedings of his colleagues. He was prepared to find any number of people guilty of any kind of crimes, without a glance at

depositions, or the faintest examination of the witnesses. "It's a bad world," he seemed to argue, "and the more people we can send to prison the better."

Fortunately, the foreman of the jury was well up in the business, as actors have it. He had played the part on previous occasions, liked it, and had won some applause in it. He dealt with the matters coming before him with brisk decision, and saved his fellow-jurymen much trouble. For one or two of them would have taken a sort of conscientious view of their situation as grand-jurymen. Carried away by the eloquence of the judge, they had positively begun to believe that their services were of a critical kind.

"Stop," said the foreman at length; "we're going too fast. We've found all these to be true bills; we must now ignore one."

"Why?" some one asked—a very young man, whose appearance bespoke little intellectual endowment.

"A grand-jury always ignores at least *one* bill," said the foreman oracularly. "What would be the

good of it if it *found* every bill?" This was quite unanswerable.

The bill before them happened to be one relating to a very atrocious case of wife-beating.

"Throw it out," said Mr. Snelgrove, for the first time taking any active part in the proceedings. "I daresay his wife deserved all she got."

The ground stated was hardly sufficient to justify the ignoring of the bill. Still, it was ignored—much, as appeared ultimately, to the surprise of the wife-beater, and really to the joy of the beaten wife.

By-and-by, the judge was complimenting the grand-jury upon the sagacity and discrimination they had displayed in the discharge of their duties.

Mr. Snelgrove's cares were over. With his brother jurors he was now at liberty to pursue his ordinary avocations. Still, a custom prevailed of rewarding the grand-jury for their labours. The reward was not of a very precious kind. But they were, it appeared, privileged to inspect a model prison established in connection with the criminal court, in whose proceedings they had taken a small

share. Many of the jurors declined to avail themselves of this advantage—some, indeed, scoffed at it openly. They had had enough of the law and its process for one while, and were glad enough to turn their backs upon it, and to hurry elsewhere. Still, so much time was felt to have been wasted, that a little more or less couldn't really matter. The hours of business were over; the day was practically gone.

"Why not see the prison?" Mr. Snelgrove and certain of his colleagues asked themselves. "It's all in our day's work. We shan't perhaps have another opportunity; and, no doubt, a prison must be a curious kind of place. Suppose we go?"

"Go, by all means," said the foreman, addressing himself to Mr. Snelgrove. He had taken quite a fancy to Mr. Snelgrove, since that gentleman had so promptly asserted himself, and proposed the ignoring of the bill against the wife-beater. The foreman regarded Mr. Snelgrove as one of the most promising grand-jurymen he had ever met with; and his experience in that regard was considerable.

"Go, by all means ; you'll find it exceedingly interesting. It's too late to do anything ; I'll come with you, if you like."

So some half-dozen jurymen, including the foreman and Mr. Snelgrove, visited the model prison. They were most cordially received by the governor or his representative.

They were much impressed, of course, with the massiveness of the building ; with the vast amount of stone and iron that had been employed in its construction. Mr. Snelgrove had rarely beheld an edifice of such strength and solidity. It reminded him of a representation of a fortress he had once seen at the theatre ; probably during a performance of "King John," or some such play. They traversed various passages and corridors ; they were conducted up and down, here and there. They found all the arrangements admirable ; they were greatly struck with the perfect discipline and organisation of the establishment. They were led into the kitchen, and surveyed the method of preparing the food of the prisoners—it was surprising. They even tasted the soup—it was

excellent; no one could possibly desire better for his own table, they declared. The foreman constituted himself a sort of supplementary showman of the institution. For Mr. Snelgrove's edification, he enriched the information supplied by the governor with many valuable observations of his own. He had frequently visited the prison—always as a grand-juryman, it was understood—took much pride and interest in it; and was anxious that it should be seen to the best advantage, and that it should be explored down to its most curious particulars.

"Wonderful! isn't it?" he said. "Perfect, I call it; and clean! why, you might eat off the floor. Everything possible is done for the prisoners' comfort; the treatment is in every respect admirable. The system is beyond improvement. The pitch they carry these things to nowadays! Such a contrast to the old practice! Why, a few years back, if you'll believe me, the prisoners had scarcely enough to eat—shocking! We're now going to inspect one or two of the cells."

It is to be noted that institutions for the criminal or the unfortunate classes are endowed with a sort of museum characteristic. They invariably possess specimens upon which they especially pride themselves — choice curiosities, which are expected greatly to amaze the visitor, and to afford him even pleasure—of a peculiar sort. The love of contrast is rooted in our nature; its power over us is as undeniable as it is enduring. “Look at this picture—all black; now, turn to this—all white: is it not surprising?” So runs the argument; a mere trick, if you will; yet it never fails in its effect upon a mixed audience. The absurd old superstition about the jewel in the toad’s head owed its vitality, surely, to its broad appeal to the popular passion for contrast. It was a delight to many to think of the precious gem in connection with the odious reptile; they found it very hard to surrender the preposterous fiction. It supplied in a convenient form that simple “such-is-life” sort of moral, which is so valued by the community —possibly because it taxes their intelligence so slightly. Any dolt can preach a sermon upon such

a text; and we are all much fonder of preaching than we are of listening to preachers.

So, in the establishments we are considering, there is always to be discovered an inmate whose position excites mingled surprise and sentiment of this nature. “That *he* should be *here!*” is the exclamation; “think of his past!—consider his present! Is not the comparison startling?” And then, of course, if your fancy is fecund, or your moralising fit is strongly on you, forthwith you may indulge in much choice conjecture as to the future of the person in view. Visit a jail, a refuge, a casual ward. “We had a senior wrangler here last week!” is the impressive whisper in your ear. “The ups and downs of life! Surprising, isn’t it? Quite surprising!” and so on.

Study of the matter enables one to classify in some degree the criminals and unfortunates who become the typical curiosities of the institutions in which they find incarceration or shelter, as the case may be. The division must not be understood too arbitrarily; but the visitor may rely, more or less, upon being introduced to, or permitted to inspect,

firstly, the officer in the army, who has served with credit in a crack regiment, but has been brought low by pecuniary necessity developing into dishonesty; secondly, the country gentleman, who once owned rich landed possessions, and hunted the southern division of Blankshire, but whose profligate courses and proneness to drink have reduced him to the desperate plight in which you now find him (generally, this specimen has been recently breaking stones in the road, or working as a day-labourer in the docks, or as a navvy on a railway, and his appearance is particularly squalid); and, thirdly, the clergyman or the university man who was once deemed of singular credit to his college, whom some strange warp in his moral nature has rendered peculiarly amenable to the censure of his country's criminal tribunals. Of these specimens, the first and third are perhaps the most common.

Mr. Snelgrove, in his tour through the model prison, was introduced to various examples which could fairly be distributed among these classes, it being recognised that their boundaries are of an

elastic kind. To be sure, the country gentleman was not represented on the occasion, but the others were there in great force.

"Shocking! isn't it?" commented Mr. Snelgrove's friend, the foreman. "Cavalry officer—man of good family—distinguished himself in the Crimea, I understand—come to this! Two years! Ingenious fraud upon brother officer. The thing reduced to a system. Nothing to be said for him. Really a bad case, you know. And yet, gentlemanly-looking man, eh?—would be an ornament to any drawing-room, certainly. You can see his military training; even the prison dress can't hide that, you know. Sad—very sad. Ah! and *this* is a very curious case—came before the grand-jury only last session. I remember going very carefully through the depositions; but the thing was as clear as the sun at noonday. There was nothing to be said for the prisoner: we could do nothing but bring in a true bill; and the common-jury, I understand, found him guilty without even turning round in their box—*nem. con.*, you know—and yet, you wouldn't believe it, to look at him. And there

seemed to be no apparent motive—sort of morbid love of imposition. No other way of accounting for it. College man—well brought up—took high honours, I believe—yet was possessed with an extraordinary fancy for pretending to be a clergyman. Preached, I understand, in various places, and was found admirable in the pulpit—man of first-rate abilities—imposed upon a great number of country rectors. Had the gift, you understand; but never ordained. No more a parson, really, than you or me. Curious, isn't it? But he got passing false cheques at last—wonderful number of charges against him—took in country tradesmen of all kinds. Nothing for it but to convict him at last. A game of that sort *must* come to an end sooner or later, you know."

"He was tried last session?"

"Only last session. Name of Grove—but he had many an *alias*. I remember the case particularly, because my wife's sister's husband has a cousin named Grove; no relation, of course. One of the most curious cases I ever remember. All he got was a few fees from country rectors

for acting temporarily as curate. Never stayed long in one place; was too cunning for that. It all came out in the course of the trial, although the real charge against him was something quite different—as I said, passing fictitious cheques. They wanted to prove him mad; but *that* was no use, not a bit. No more mad than you or me. Yet, strange thing, wasn't it? A man of his position and abilities—first-rate scholar, I understand—to sink so low. You wouldn't believe it, to look at him. Most gentlemanly-looking man; perfect address, attractive manners. So it appeared in evidence."

The prisoner was tall and slight, with a drooping, narrow-chested figure. He had dry, wiry, tow-coloured hair, very pink eyelids, small ferret eyes, and a singularly long chin.

His appearance altogether was certainly remarkable. He seemed perfectly at ease—but little distressed by his situation; and he took scarcely any notice of his visitors. He stood up, however, and saluted respectfully the governor

and the party he brought with him into the cell.

"That's all, I think," said the foreman presently. "We've seen all the lions, and done the thing very thoroughly. Queer place a prison, isn't it? Wonderful, though, the discipline, and the whole system of management. Like clock-work, eh? Shocking thing, human depravity. Couldn't get on without prisons and punishments; could we?—Why, bless my soul, how pale you look!" Mr. Snelgrove's face was certainly very white. "I see how it is. You miss your lunch. I ought to have thought of it, but I never touch lunch myself. A good breakfast, and I can always hold on until dinner. But I daresay you feel the want of it. Do now, there's a good fellow, go and get a glass of sherry and a biscuit. There's a very well-conducted house close by. I must be off, for I've a train to catch. Take care of yourself. The whole thing's been so new to you—the court, and the prison, and that—it's a little upset you. I'm an old hand at it. You'll come

to be, in time, for the sheriff doesn't leave one long in peace. We shall meet again in the grand-jury-box some of these days, I don't doubt. God bless you ! ” And the foreman departed.

CHAPTER V.

MR. SNELGROVE'S DISCOVERY.

MR. SNELGROVE stood alone for a few minutes outside the prison, in doubt as to whither he should bend his steps. He removed his hat, and dabbed his moist forehead with his handkerchief. His hand trembled very much as he performed this simple operation; indeed, he found his whole frame curiously agitated. His strength seemed suddenly to have deserted him, while he felt his heart beating with a painful turbulence. He entered a neighbouring tavern—it was the “well-conducted” house his friend the foreman had alluded to—and fortified himself with a strong dose of brandy-and-water. He tried to eat a biscuit, but he was unable to accomplish that; his mouth was too parched for so arid an article

of food; indeed his appetite had completely failed him.

He perceived that by the public-house clock it was not so late as he had fancied it; so he abruptly hailed a cab, and was driven into the City. He did not proceed to his office, however, but stopped in the neighbourhood of the Mansion-house, at the door of an old-fashioned coffee-house. It was a dark, close, somewhat shabby resort, yet was deemed cosy by many who found something enjoyable in want of daylight and absence of fresh air. It was chiefly remarkable for the fact that it kept files of several newspapers. Its customers had the privilege of inspecting the back numbers of the leading metropolitan and a few provincial journals.

Upon his request Mr. Snelgrove was supplied with a file of the *Times* newspaper. He surveyed with some dismay the bulky mass of printed matter that was placed before him. Then he steadily set to work at examining the copies of the paper for some months back. He turned to the Law Reports, generally printed on the

concluding pages of the great journal; and particularly, it was to be observed, he perused the records of cases tried at the Clerkenwell Sessions House. He had been for some little time intensely occupied thus, when a sudden touch on the shoulder made him start in a curiously alarmed way. It was plain his nerves were in a very unstrung condition. He could with difficulty repress a scream.

"Hollo, Snelgrove, who'd have thought of seeing you here!"

The inquirer was a corpulent, elderly gentleman, who had been sitting over a *not* "slowly dying pint of port" in an adjoining box. The room was divided into separate stalls, each partition being surmounted with green curtains, so that the general effect was as that of a city chancel crowded with churchwardens' pews.

"Mr. Goodenough!" exclaimed Mr. Snelgrove, in a kind of gasp.

"To be sure. How are you? You hardly look yourself."

He was very bright as to colour, was Mr. Goodenough; his countenance was as a bouquet

of scarlet and white geraniums. It was either the intense redness of his cheeks that made his hair seem so particularly white, or else it was the whiteness of his hair that heightened by contrast the glow of his face. Then he wore round his neck a capacious very stiff white cravat. If you object to the floral comparison, please think of a carbuncle set in a silver rim, and you'll have a notion of Mr. Goodenough's striking lustre and flush of aspect. He was, it should be stated, a solicitor, occupying premises in the neighbourhood of the coffee-house.

"I'm not very well—dead-tired—that's the fact," said Mr. Snelgrove; and then, as though moved by a sudden impulse, he related to his companion his adventures at Clerkenwell.

"Grand-jury, eh? Great nuisance, of course, to a man of business; but must be done. We must respect the law. It's all very well to talk of abolishing the grand-jury system. How could we get on without it? that's what I want to know. Prisoners *must* be found guilty, and punished, I suppose. I hate to hear people talk in that

random way. Why, they'll be wanting to abolish the Lord Chancellor next ; and *then*, where would be the glory of old England, I should like to know ! ”

It occurred to Mr. Snelgrove that somehow his native country might possibly manage to exist, even if deprived of the services of the exalted functionary referred to by Mr. Goodenough. He did not give expression to this notion, however. Indeed, he was, as it seemed, too much occupied with his narrative to diverge into a discussion upon topics apart from it.

He told of his visit to the model prison, and mentioned, with some minuteness, the captives he had there inspected. In regard to the pseudo-clergyman prisoner, his interest seemed much stirred. Finally, he submitted, with a sort of sickly inquietude and hesitation, to his friend, whether, as one learned in the law, he thought that any marriage—say, to put a case—performed by this man, supposing, in his assumed character of a minister, that he had ever been guilty of such a deed—and it was understood that he had

undertaken the duties of a curate in more than one parish, and therefore the case might easily have occurred—would, now, such a marriage hold good, in point of fact, and be binding upon the parties?

“Why should it?” demanded Mr. Goodenough.
“The scoundrel wasn’t ordained.”

“But, you see,” said Mr. Snelgrove timidously,
“the ceremony would be performed in a church.”

“What does that matter? It’s the parson marries, not the church. Would a marriage by a beadle, or a verger, or a pew-opener, be any good, let them read the service in what church they pleased? No; not if they read it in St. Paul’s or Westminster Abbey, it wouldn’t. It’s monstrous to suppose it. And the thing’s been decided before now, though I can’t give you, off-hand, the exact reference to the case. I could find it with a little trouble, though, if it were worth while. Such a marriage would be null and void; no question at all about it.”

“And what remedies, now, would the parties have in such a case? You see it would come

very hard upon them. They would be quite blameless in the matter."

"Of course, it would be hard upon them. It's hard upon a man when a burglar breaks into his house, or when his pocket's picked. He's not to blame; yet he suffers. The only thing the parties could do would be to get married over again as soon as possible, and to take care they made a good job of it the second time; but it isn't likely such a thing would happen twice to anybody."

"But one of them—the man, let us suppose—might cry off."

"He might, if he were villain enough; there would be nothing to prevent him."

"And suppose children had been born?"

"It would make no difference, though it would be uncommon hard upon the poor things; and no doubt an Act of Parliament might be obtained to set them right, and legitimise them. Parliament, you see, can do any mortal thing; and private acts, I know, *have* been obtained in such cases; though a private act, let me tell you, is an expensive affair. Let us hope the scoundrel didn't

do anything quite so bad as you're supposing. I daresay he only preached and read prayers —something of that kind; and to this day the congregation don't know that he hadn't got what you may call the 'hall-mark' upon him. 'Electro' is so very like the genuine metal nowadays. Good night. I must be off, or I shall miss my 'bus; there's one starts from the 'Flowerpot' in five minutes. You're never down Clapton way, or I should be very glad to see you. Always at home in the evening. I didn't know you took such an interest in legal matters. Wonderful thing *law*, isn't it? You can't dig for five minutes in *that* field without turning up something valuable —at least lawyers can't. You've evidently a taste for it. I shouldn't wonder, now, but they spoiled a very good solicitor when they made you a tea-broker. Business pretty brisk? All well at Liverpool? That's well. Good night."

And Mr. Snelgrove was left alone. He studied his back numbers of the *Times* for a little while longer; found what he was searching for, apparently; made some entries in his

pocket-book; and then he also quitted the coffee-house.

He proceeded still further into the City—to his office in Fenchurch Street, indeed. It was closed for the night. He rang the bell, and was of course recognised and forthwith admitted by the housekeeper.

He lighted the gas, and unlocked the iron safe. Within the safe was a drawer which he reserved for private papers not connected with his business affairs. He unlocked this drawer, and took from it a bundle of letters, written in a sprawling, ill-formed hand. At the top of this packet was an oblong slip of blue paper neatly folded.

This document he carefully examined. It was a certified copy of the registry of the marriage, at the parish church of Barbel-le-Minnows, of James Snelgrove, bachelor, and Eliza Hobbs, spinster, both of full age; George Snelgrove, the father of James, being described as a tea-broker, and Gideon Hobbs, the father of Elizabeth, being described as a labourer. The names of the

witnesses were added, and it was shown that the officiating clergyman was one John Grove, M.A., who, indeed, certified the correctness of the extract from the register.

"There *can* be no mistake," said Mr. Snelgrove, as he passed his hand across his wet forehead, his face ghastly white under the gaslight. "I knew the man at once; I was certain of it directly I set eyes upon him. He was not the kind of man one could fail to identify. It's all quite clear. My marriage is null and void. *Eliza is not my wife!*"

CHAPTER VI.

TOM BLACKLOCK AND HIS SISTER.

PERHAPS more than anything else Mr. Snelgrove was, in the first instance, simply frightened at the discovery he had made. While he was serving upon the grand-jury, we took the liberty of likening him to a peculiarly situated supernumerary in a theatre. He now resembled such an inferior member of a dramatic company, of whom has been suddenly required the performance of a leading character in a kind of domestic tragedy. He felt unprepared—"taken aback," as it is termed—altogether unequal and unsuited to the part he was called upon to play.

Yet with his feeling of alarm there mingled a curious sensation of pleasure.

It was but a few hours back he had been say-

ing to himself sententiously: "Marriage is a mistake." For men are prone to generalise in this way on the strength of a particular case—to judge the universe by the individual. As a tea-broker, Mr. Snelgrove should have remembered that the mass does not invariably correspond with the sample. True, it is sometimes worse—but that's in trade. His own marriage had been contracted out of business hours—away from Fenchurch Street; it had been prompted by quite uncommercial considerations.

He should have said rather that *his* marriage was a mistake—quite apart from the error in regard to the officiating minister. Perhaps it was. Still it was his own doing. If the result had been unfortunate—and I fear it must be conceded that such was indeed the case—he had only himself to blame for it. Not that a reflection to that effect, so far as I know, has ever enabled a man to bear his troubles with any more fortitude and philosophy. There is little comfort to be got out of self-accusation. Whereas it is a sort of relief, no doubt, to be able to charge some one else with

being the cause and origin of one's sufferings.

But now escape was open to him. He could snap the link that bound him to Eliza Hobbs. He need fear no longer the indignation of his family at his having married beneath him. He had only to speak, and there was an end of his marriage—his wife was no more his wife. Should he speak, or should he hold his tongue? What should he do?

What he ought to do he could not—did not doubt. As men go—and City men especially—James Snelgrave was an honest man. He knew what duty prescribed; in that regard he had no kind of hesitation. It was plainly his duty to take Eliza Hobbs straightway, at the earliest possible moment, to the nearest church, and before a properly ordained clergyman, to renew the vows of their marriage. It was the fault of neither that there had existed a legal flaw in the ceremony solemnised at Barbel-le-Minnows, which had made void their union. For either to take advantage of this flaw would be simply infamous—would be

especially so in the case of the husband. How could he justify the infliction of so irreparable a wrong upon Eliza Hobbs as his abandonment of her?—in the proclamation of the fact that she was not in truth his wife, and had therefore no kind of legal claim upon him?

He could justify it in no way. Still he hesitated. He enjoyed, with some trepidation and a beating heart, the sense of the power he was possessed of; he even said to himself, with a kind of iniquitous chuckle: “At any rate, I have the whip-hand of her now!”

Should he ply his whip-hand? and was poor Eliza to be made to writhe beneath his lash?

Well, at present, he could not decide. In his worst-disposed moments he said it would all depend upon the nature of her behaviour towards him in the future. Her position was mined, and he could fire the train at any moment, and overwhelm her; but under certain circumstances he felt that he would not stoop to this cruel proceeding.

He paltered with his sense of what was right—

and so, of course, did wrong. That is, he determined to do nothing for a while. But action was required of him if he would still be regarded as an honest man—action in the way of remedying an accidental injustice. Passivity was acquiescence in it—endurance of it with a shameful motive: almost as bad as taking active and immediate advantage of it.

He argued that he must, at any rate, have time to determine the course he would pursue. Was that so very reprehensible? he asked himself. His situation was one of extreme embarrassment. The thing had come upon him so suddenly, he hardly yet understood it in all its bearings. Surely a little delay was not so very unreasonable. For what harm could delay do? As yet *she* knew nothing of the matter—it was most unlikely that she would ever know it except from him. She was quite convinced of her security. She could not even dream that her character as a married woman was in grave peril; nay, for the matter of that, was in truth gone from her. She could have said with Othello: “He that is robbed, not

wanting what is stolen, let him not know 't, and he's not robbed at all." She knew nothing of her loss, and therefore, practically, was not to be accounted a loser.

The mischief was done; still, it could be repaired to-morrow, the day after, any day. Time was of little consideration in the matter—any morning he could obtain a license, and take her again to church. In half an hour the misdeeds of John Grove, M.A.—the model-prison convict—could be remedied; and her status would be as unassailable in fact as it now was in seeming—so far as the outside world was concerned; and there was really nothing she could reproach herself with, or him either. Cognisance of John Grove's frauds could not, by any chance, be imputed to his victims—that was quite beyond question.

But suppose an excess of delay, and the birth of a child; and expectations of this nature were already in course of entertainment at the Regent's Park villa. Would not that child be damned—be liable to be called an ugly name, according to the strict letter of the law of its native land?

No doubt that would be so, Mr. Snelgrove admitted with some reluctance; but still he did not contemplate, at present at all events, any long period of inactivity. He was merely, just now, asking for time for deliberation. Besides, he added, even if the worst should come to the worst, and a child enter the world before its parents' union had been legalised, Mr. Goodenough, the solicitor, had pointed out the proper course to be pursued. A private act was obtainable at any time. Mr. Snelgrove assured himself that he could afford the expense if it was absolutely necessary. But—a thousand things might happen; the child might not be born alive, or might not live, &c. Moreover, he repeated, no excess of delay was contemplated in the matter.

So the tea-broker yielded so far to the temptation that was proffered him. He decided to do nothing—to await the issue of events—to let things take their course—comforting himself with the reflection that this was only what lawyers call an interlocutory judgment.

And it must be said for him that he felt a little

ashamed of himself—was conscious of the deviation from rectitude comprised in this decision. Perhaps it was for this reason he hurried from the City, and ordered a somewhat sumptuous repast at a West-End restaurant. He dined well—even too well. There was a flush of repletion and champagne upon his face when, late in the evening, he admitted himself, by means of his latch-key, into his house near the Regent's Park. He had floated himself on wine far from the sand-banks of thought. For mental cares, he had substituted bodily suffering : such as a heated circulation, a throbbing brow, and other incidents of ineptitude.

He was surprised to see so many lights in the windows—to hear the sounds of laughter and conversation—to smell very strongly-flavoured tobacco-smoke. He paused a moment in the hall, to consider what could have happened.

“Is that you, James?” asked Mrs. Snelgrove—it is convenient still to permit her that name, notwithstanding her defective title to it—appearing at the dining-room door.

“Yes; it’s me,” he answered, harshly and un-

grammatically. She did not care about the bad grammar, but she seemed struck by his tone of voice. Her look had been smiling and good-natured, with yet an air of triumph and defiance about it. Still, upon the whole, it was not unciliatory.

“Who’s in there?” he demanded, pointing to the parlour.

She hesitated; then blurted out boldly: “Tom Blacklock and his sister.”

“*Who?*” shouted Mr. Snelgrove angrily.

“Tom Blacklock and his sister,” she repeated. Then went on hurriedly, and with the slightest hint of apprehension in her voice: “I *did* go to the Palace, although you would not take me. I was determined the tickets should not be lost. At the station, I met Tom and Mary—quite by chance: the poor things had come up for a day’s pleasure. They didn’t know it was a festival, and that the prices were raised. I thought it such a pity they should be disappointed; so I gave Tom your ticket, and I treated Mary. They enjoyed themselves immensely. I’ve been with them all day; and they

came back with me for a bit of supper. Unfortunately, they've missed their train, and so I was going to make shift, and give them house-room somewhere for a few hours."

"Bring a light," he said. He pushed past her, and entered the drawing-room.

"Won't you come in and see them? They're old friends, you know. They've been quite looking forward to meeting you again." She followed him with a candle.

He sat down in an easy-chair, and began to take off his boots. He accomplished this operation clumsily, and seemed to grow more irritated.

"How dare you bring these people to my house?" he cried out presently, his face additionally flushed from his stooping position.

Mrs. Snelgrove looked a little frightened.

"Do you think I'm going to allow that infernal blacksmith to smoke his filthy pipe in my dining-room? If he's not gone in five minutes, I'll kick him out of the house."

Practically considered, this was rather a vain

threat. Mr. Snelgrove was tolerably robust; but Tom Blacklock was a man of colossal stature and Herculean strength. To have moved him an inch in a direction he had not listed to move, would have been no light task. As to one unassisted man's kicking him out of a house—well, a regiment of life-guards might possibly have achieved such a feat.

Upon reflection, this view of the situation, perhaps, occurred to Mr. Snelgrove: "I'll send for a policeman; I'll give him in charge," he observed. "I won't be intruded upon in this way," and he added an oath to his declaration—to give it greater force.

Mrs. Snelgrove ventured to urge something in defence of her visitors: they were old friends; she had known them ever since her childhood; it was no fault of theirs that they had missed their train; they were most worthy and respectable people; there was not a word to be said against Tom Blacklock and his sister; they had always shown her the greatest kindness.

"What's come to you, James?" she asked

finally. "What makes you so cross? Why shouldn't my friends be made welcome? It will be no trouble; *you* needn't be disturbed; they can be made comfortable until the early train starts, without interfering with you in any way."

Mr. Snelgrove answered simply, that if *they* were to stay in the house, *he* wouldn't; that was all; and that she'd better take care. His manner was morose and menacing in the extreme as he said this.

Mrs. Snelgrove averred that he was a cold heartless man, and that she was quite ashamed of him, *that* she was. She added a wish that she had known earlier in life his real nature—*that* she did!

Presently, as though with a spasm of penitence, she said that she was sorry if she had offended him. Next, with a return of obduracy, she inquired how she was to know that he objected to her receiving her old associates?

He only answered with gloomy mutterings, and with indistinctly expressed desires in regard to the punching of some one's head.

This exceedingly disagreeable debate was suddenly interrupted by the gruff voice of Tom Blacklock heard without. "Look here, Liz," he said—he addressed himself, as it were, to an imaginary Mrs. Snelgrove, for he couldn't really see her from the position he occupied in the passage. "We don't want to give no trouble; so we'll clear out, please. It don't matter to us much; we can put up anywhere till the train starts. I feared we should be in the way; I said so all along. It isn't *your* fault, I know; but the gentleman" (he always alluded to Mr. Snelgrove vaguely as "the gentleman") "don't like it; I thought he wouldn't. You see you're a fine lady now, and different to us rough folk. So Mary and me will hook it, please. We don't want to give no offence to the gentleman, we don't; and we haven't a word of fault to find with you, we haven't: quite t'other. I thank you for all your kindness; and God bless you, Liz—though I oughtn't to say 'Liz,' I know; but old habits gets the better of me. And we're much obliged to you—and, thanks to you, we've enjoyed our

selves rarely, and had a regular right-down jolly day, I call it. And tell the gentleman we won't call again, or be any kind of ill-convenience to him. It isn't likely, you know. It's seldom as we gets to London; and it isn't our way at all. And many thanks to him—and God bless him, too" (but this was less fervently ejaculated); "and good night to you."

And so saying, Tom Blacklock and his sister departed. For all his formidable aspect, he was a well-spoken and agreeably dispositioned young giant, was the blacksmith from Barbel-le-Minnows.

"So *this* is how my friends are to be treated, is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Snelgrove, as the door closed upon her old associates, Tom Blacklock and his sister.

"And *you* call yourself a *wife*!" said Mr. Snelgrove, with exceeding bitterness.

They glared at each other. It was a painful scene.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM BAD TO WORSE.

“THE beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water,” wrote King Solomon.

Strife of a grave nature had begun between Mr. and Mrs. Snelgrove. The water was let out, and was coming upon them with a fierce rush, that threatened to swamp and sweep away altogether such happiness as had ever pertained to their union. They were divided—in part by the flaw in their marriage, known to one of them, and by his knowledge of that flaw—and also, generally, by what the lawyers have agreed to call “incompatibility of temper.” And this incompatibility seemed to grow and strengthen day by day; while, like jealousy, it mocked the meat it fed on.

Still James Snelgrove kept his secret—held his peace—made no movement towards abandoning his wife, or apprising her of the falseness of the position she occupied. But his sense of holding what he had termed “the whip-hand of her” no longer afforded him satisfaction. The responsibility of power began to outweigh its pleasure. He was sometimes inclined to wish that he had never made that discovery at the model prison, which assured him of the nullity of his marriage. Admitting that his home was to be an unhappy one—that day by day he was to be more and more convinced that his choice of a wife was a fatuous error—still, would not the fact of the insolubility of the tie which bound him to her, have afforded him philosophy to bear his fate and to make the best of it? Would not time and use have gradually reconciled him to what was irremediable, and given him fortitude to endure it?

But now it had been shown to him that he might escape if he would—that his bondage, as he had come to consider it, was illegal and

illusory—if he could but muster courage and cruelty enough to take active steps in the matter. At present, he could not. He was ashamed of his secret, ashamed of his cowardice in doing nothing, either for good or evil with regard to it. He chafed under the burden imposed upon him by his own weakness and indecision. Now he was tempted to reveal everything honestly, and remarry his wife. Certainly such a course would be in some sort a relief to his mind. But then came the thought of the folly—the monstrous folly, as it seemed to him, comprised in such a step. He was miserable with his wife; he had begun almost to hate her; why should he rivet round his neck a yoke that was unbearable, when he could at once, by a word, loose and rend it for ever? The opportunity of freeing himself was open to him in a way that seemed almost providential. It would be idiotic not to take advantage of it, he argued. Still he hesitated.

He grew querulous, morose; he looked pale and worn; he lost his old genial elasticity of manner; he cared no more for the comic journals, and aban-

doned his regard for conundrums ; he kept late hours, and became somewhat reckless in his method of life ; smoking and drinking far more than was good for him. "Poor old Jemmy !" whispered Perkins of the Stock Exchange to Plimpton the sugar-broker. "I knew how it would be. That woman, you know ! He's quite a changed man ; she's made his life a burden to him." And the twain indulged in much unfavourable comment in regard to the nature and disposition of "Mrs. S.," as they described her. Certainly at this time the Regent's Park establishment was reduced to a state of exceeding discomfort.

Mrs. Snelgrove was conscious that her conduct had been blameworthy—that in the matter of her following her husband to the Sessions House, visiting the Crystal Palace alone in his absence, and regaling Tom Blacklock and his sister, she had acted inconsiderately, to say the least of it. She would have confessed as much fully, and even besought pardon for her errors, if she could have believed that her approaches would have been favourably received. But she could read no sign

of relenting towards her in Mr. Snelgrove's aspect. His manner was severe to a degree. Then in her turn she became irritated and angry ; she stood on the defensive. After all, she asked herself, what had she done ? Nothing that was really wrong. She was sorry if he was offended with her—and she was willing to avow as much—what more could she do ? She put the matter very simply when she said : “ If he *will* make a fool of himself, how can I help it ? ”

She was naturally obstinate, and she entertained a high opinion of herself, and of the potency of her influence over him. “ He'll come round,” she said. “ He's in a tantrum, but he'll get the better of it, and things will go on as usual. Better do nothing until his nasty temper's over.” She had found him placable on former occasions, when little differences of opinion had arisen between them, and she had not then been required to stoop very low, or to humble herself very much, to re-establish a good understanding. It was true, however, that no former difference had been so grave as this. Their old disagreements had been in the nature of those lovers'

quarrels which, as we know, are the renewal of love; whereas the present was a grave rupture between man and wife, and hardly likely, therefore, to be attended by such agreeable results.

To do her justice, Mrs. Snelgrove, in her own self-satisfied way, struggled to mollify the anger of her spouse; she looked, and smiled, and dressed her best. She was more intent than ever on household cares—an error in judgment, as it happened, but she didn't know that. She was anxious to efface all painful recollection in regard to the past, by means of her zealous consideration of the present and the future. With laborious blandishments she sought to charm back the errant love of her lord. But Mr. Snelgrove was not to be charmed back. He might have been, perhaps, but for that dreadful secret, which was embittering and sapping all the springs of kindness in his bosom. He could not yield himself a captive while he knew that absolute freedom was within his power.

Then Mrs. Snelgrove lost patience, and gave the reins to her temper. She became that furious creature, "a woman scorned"—"put upon," as she

elected to express it. There came to be open and protracted war between husband and wife.

She abandoned pacific and conciliatory measures. She was now bent, as it were, upon crushing mutiny with an iron hand. She stood upon her strict rights, and sued for justice and her bond. She would compel her husband, by main force if necessary, to recognise his duty, return to his allegiance, and become again subject to his home.

She was jealous, too—wildly jealous. If she had lost influence over him, it must clearly be because some other had intervened, and lured away his affections. She said, with a terribly inflamed face, that she should much like to set eyes upon that woman ! “Minx!” I believe, was the precise term she applied to her.

The condition of things in the Regent’s Park villa became, in fine, simply desperate—quite a scandal to the whole neighbourhood. No one interfered, of course. The quarrels of the married have somehow come to be regarded in England as fairly matched fights, with regard to which a policy of non-intervention should prevail; they must be

fought out and conclude of themselves. Of the combatants, it seemed to be agreed that there was, as people said, "Six of one and half-a-dozen of the other." Such sympathy as the warfare excited took its character from the sex of the sympathisers—male neighbours denounced Mrs. Snelgrove as a scold; female neighbours proclaimed Mr. Snelgrove to be a brute. All agreed that the man and wife constituted a wretched couple. And yet how fond and happy and united they had seemed when first they took up their abode in the villa!

That Mr. Snelgrove neglected and avoided his wife in every possible way, was certain; for days together he would absent himself from his home, taking up his abode at an hotel in Covent Garden. Then Mrs. Snelgrove declared that, at any rate, *that* should not continue. Her place was at his side. However wretched they might be together, still together they should be, she was very determined. To treatment of that sort she most certainly would not submit. She vowed, therefore, that she would not lose sight of him; that whithersoever he went, she would follow him. Her eye should be upon

him and his doings incessantly. She dogged his footsteps like a shadow; she pursued him hither and thither. She invaded his office, and afforded curious diversion to his clerks; she was to be seen waiting and watching at those sacred City places where tea-brokers and merchants most do congregate; she made him the laughing-stock of Fenchurch Street. He was overwhelmed with rage and shame; he was nearly driven mad; he knew not what to do.

There were lulls in the storm occasionally—checks, so to speak, in the chase. Anger could not invariably be sustained at this white heat. Now and then, the conduct of each of the contending parties lapsed, as it were, almost from exhaustion, into a condition more nearly resembling decorum: a sort of tacit truce seemed to prevail for a brief period. Then the fire would break out again as with new force—for, indeed, it had never ceased to burn—although its inflammation underwent some variety of aspect.

"I *must* put an end to this at any cost," Mr. Snelgrove cried one day impetuously, after some

especial act of persecution and wildness on the part of his wife. Indeed, it was very clear that things could no longer be permitted to go on as they had been and were then going on, for Mr. Snelgrove's business as a tea-broker was suffering, and his character in the City was at stake.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

ONE morning, Mr. Snelgrove found at his office awaiting him a letter, urgently entreating him to proceed at once to Liverpool. It appeared that his uncle, Mr. Joshua Snelgrove, the head of the House of Snelgrove, and the leading representative of the family's business in various parts of the globe, had been seized with paralysis, and was in a precarious state.

Such a summons it was of course very necessary to obey forthwith. Mr. Snelgrove determined that he would at once pack his portmanteau, and journey to Liverpool by the mid-day train. If possible, he would have avoided first calling at his house in the Regent's Park ; but he felt he could hardly present himself at his uncle's residence—

for the Snelgroves lived after a stately fashion in the North, as became the dignity of their position in the mercantile world—without his dress clothes ; and it so happened that those garments of his had been left at his villa residence. It was unfortunate, because he foresaw the probability, almost the certainty, of a “scene” occurring with his wife on the subject of his departure—or generally in reference to the very bad terms now subsisting between them. However, there was no help for it. He hurried from the City in a cab. Entering his house, he saw nothing of his wife. He concluded, with some glee, that she was from home ; he made no inquiry of the servant. He was bent upon availing himself of the opportunity to pack up his clothes and the few things necessary for his journey, and to retreat quietly. He proceeded to his dressing-room, and was busy with the straps of his portmanteau when she entered.

She wore a shawl huddled round her ; seemed, indeed, to be in a feeble state of health. She had been strangely pale until she perceived her husband ; then an angry feverish flush burned in

her cheeks ; her hands moved tremulously, and there was a quavering in her voice when she spoke. " You here ! " she said angrily, yet with hardly her wonted vehemence.

" I'm going away directly."

" I thought I should have died in the night," she continued. " I was obliged to send for Dr. Joyce, I've been so bad. Much you'd have cared, though, if I *had* died ! "

He might have seen that she looked wretchedly ill, but he hardly glanced at her. Indeed, it had come to this with him now, that he was quite heedless how she looked.

" Where are you going ? " she demanded.

" Out of town."

" Where to ? "

" That's my business."

" You mean to say you won't tell me ? " She laid her hand upon his arm ; he shook himself free, not violently, however.

" I mean to say it doesn't concern you. I wouldn't go if I could avoid it ; but I can't. It's a matter of importance—but—it's nothing to you."

“James!” There was something pitiful in her tone; it was subdued, plaintive, and for a moment there were tears in her eyes.

If he had but seen them—if he had but looked towards her—listened to her! Surely he might have softened; some remnant of tenderness latent in his breast would have been quickened, and he might have thought of her again as he once had thought of her. But, no doubt, the gulf between them was now very wide—needed a very liberal measure of mutual forgiveness to bridge over or close it. And his own misdeeds sundered them as well as hers. Besides, he was much occupied with his packing.

“You won’t tell me where you’re going?”

“Why should I? What is it to you? I shan’t be absent more than a day or two, I daresay.”

“Am I not your wife, James?”

He was tempted at once to say “No,” and to apprise her of her real position; but it was manifest the time was ill suited for an explanation, or for the discussion—the “scene”—which would inevitably follow it. To escape as quickly as possible

was then his prime object. So he did not answer her question.

She stood for a moment or two silent, irresolute, twisting her hands together as though she were in some sort wrestling with herself. She looked more pained than angry; yet there was an air of effort about her. "And I may not go with you?" She said this rather pleadingly than reproachfully.

"*You?* No; certainly not," he answered bluntly. He met her look just then, and started a little. He was surprised, perhaps, at the expression of her face—sorry, it might be, that he had replied to her with so little consideration for her feelings. Still, consideration as to each other's feelings had been at an end between them for some time now.

Again she seemed to be struggling with herself—to subdue the promptings of her temper—to repress words and acts that she knew it would be better not to utter or do. Again she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Pray, be quiet," he said petulantly. "I'm in a hurry. I'm going to Liverpool, if you must

know, on business ; but it's nothing to you. I've really no time to discuss the thing with you. I shall have finished in a minute, if you'll only leave me in peace. What *is* the use of going on like this, Eliza ? No use at all ; you know it isn't. For Heaven's sake, be quiet, and let me alone."

If he thought, by naming Liverpool as his place of destination, to pacify her, he was mistaken. She didn't believe him, for one thing ; for another, the concession was made too angrily and insultingly. His wrath, as it were, set hers afame. She lost command of herself ; her passion mastered her. She poured forth one of her old tirades : she denounced anew his cruelty, his treachery, his baseness. She forbade him to quit the house ; declared that whither he went she would follow him, though it was to the end of the world ; and defied him to do his worst. She snatched from his hands the clothes he was packing, flung some of them about the room, and rent others in pieces before his eyes. She would teach him, she said, to ill-treat his wife. Finally, she sat down on the portmanteau, and dared him at his peril to lay hands

upon her, and thrust her from it and displace her.

His face was white with rage and shame. Time pressed; it was useless, he saw, to continue the contest. He had now to think of escaping even with the loss of his baggage. He quitted the house; she followed him, pausing but a few moments to make some additions to her dress. He drove in a cab to the Great Northern Railway: she chased him in another vehicle. He was delayed by a little crowd of travellers at the booking-office. He was just securing his ticket when he perceived her approaching him. He hurried on to the platform—dodged round the bookstall—made his way into one of the waiting-rooms. He had evaded her. From his hiding-place he caught a glimpse of her running in a wild dishevelled state—quite like a mad woman, as it seemed to him—up and down beside the carriages; searching, inquiring, arresting guards, and porters, and policemen; questioning them, and, by dint of promises of reward, as it seemed, enlisting them in her service. He waited a moment, to assure himself

that she was fully occupied ; then he stole from the station, and ran swiftly towards the New Road. Presently he hailed a cab, and was driven to Euston Square. He proceeded to Liverpool by the London and North Western Railway.

He was too mortified to feel any triumph ; indeed it was not possible to derive satisfaction from the issue, however successful, of such a conflict. But he was now very determined to put an end to the situation out of which the conflict had arisen. It was quite clear that such a state of things could not be permitted to continue ; he must act now, it was very certain. The truth must be told—his wife must be informed that she was not really his wife ; and they must live apart for the future. He would deal generously with her. He was prepared to settle a handsome annuity upon her : she should want for nothing. She might, if she so chose, continue to occupy the Regent's Park villa : only, thenceforward they must not meet ; their union was at an end for ever. *That* was certain. So he determined—travelling to Liverpool in the train.

Arrived, he found his journey vain in this re-

spect: Mr. Joshua Snelgrove had breathed his last at an early hour that morning. The head of the great house of Snelgrove was no more. He had died at an advanced age, and, it was understood, possessed of enormous wealth.

James Snelgrove was cordially received by his relatives in the North—the greetings interchanged being, of course, of a sombre and subdued kind, as became the occasion. Still, he was made really welcome after his journey, and much thanked for the promptness with which he had undertaken it, notwithstanding its futility. It was regarded as a compliment to the departed, albeit one he could not now, of course, appreciate. The Snelgroves of the North, although they carried on their business in the heart of Liverpool, yet lived on the Cheshire side of the Mersey, in a grand white house, surrounded by park-like grounds—quite what auctioneers call “a gentleman’s residence, replete with every comfort and luxury”—for they were people of unquestionable dignity and position.

Joshua Snelgrove had left many sons and daughters, and had provided abundantly for them

all. James was struck with the good looks and graceful bearing of his cousins, the daughters of the House of Snelgrove; for the possession of unlimited wealth by a family for some generations does as much, perhaps, in the way of refining and cultivating it, especially in regard to its female members, as noble lineage and blue blood. A century of wealth may be backed against much ancestry in this regard, particularly if the last representative of a noble stock be left unfortified by fortune. There is virtue, no doubt, in the cry of "*noblesse oblige*," but money can provide the influences which render life refined by surrounding it with delicacies, and shielding it from contact with the gross and the humiliating; whereas the burden of poverty must ultimately constrain the noblest-born of shoulders to stoop; and the fight for life leave its scars upon, and coarsens, as with campaign hardships, the manners of the most eminently descended.

James Snelgrove contrasted mentally the method of life of his northern relatives with the economy of his own existence in London. He thought with

a shudder of the scene he had gone through in the morning—of the so-called wife he had with such difficulty escaped from. What if his elegant cousins were to learn of his exploits in that respect! How little they really knew him! How they would change towards him if the story of his marriage were revealed to them! How they would, and with what justice, despise him! The lies he had told to explain his want of luggage! He had said that in his hurry his portmanteau had been left behind at Euston Square, or, by some mistake, removed from the train at Crewe Junction. How ashamed they would feel of him! How could he ever have looked to their recognising Eliza Hobbs, and admitting her to the family circle! He must have been mad—stark mad—when he ventured upon that preposterous angling expedition to Barbel-le-Minnows, and married the barmaid of “The Jolly Anglers.”

Thus thinking, before the post went out, he wrote to Mrs. Snelgrove. He informed her briefly, yet clearly, and not unkindly, as he thought—apart from the main unkindness of writing at all—of the

flaw which had annulled their union. He concluded with a promise that although on this account, and by reason of their habitual disagreement, they must certainly live apart for the future, still he would take care that everything reasonable should be done for her comfort and welfare, &c.

He couldn't sleep that night—not merely because he was occupying a strange bed; but his mind was in a cruelly disturbed condition. He tried, over and over again, to persuade himself that he had only done what every other sensible man would do under like conditions; still he felt—remorse.

He couldn't but think of what his feelings had once been for Eliza Hobbs. Surely he *had* loved her—surely for a term they had been happy together! No doubt their marriage was a mistake, and had brought much misery upon them both. But was *she* only to blame? Was *she* to bear the whole burden of shame and suffering that must ensue from their separation? Was it fair? Was it honest? Was his conduct worthy of him? Might he not have shown towards her more forbearance and consideration? Had he not widened

the breach — encouraged the difference between them — infuriated her — and aggravated her in many ways ?

Of what could he accuse her ? According to her lights, she had striven to be a good wife to him, and to make his home happy and comfortable. Was she in fault, that her views in this respect were those of the station from which he had taken her ?

Well, there was her temper, no doubt. But was he not himself deserving of blame in that he had failed to ascertain the nature of her temper before entreating her to become his wife ?

As he pondered and questioned himself, he felt more tenderly towards her. Something of his old love for her stirred again in his heart. After all, what were his cousins of the North, and the elegance and state in which they lived, to him, James Snelgrove, of Fenchurch Street ? He saw them but rarely, at long intervals. Why should they and their prepossessions and views come between him and the woman who was in the sight of Heaven, if not precisely by the laws of his

country, his wife—and prevent him from doing his duty as an honest man?

Finally, it seemed to him that he would willingly have surrendered all he possessed if he could but have recalled the letter then being whirled Londonwards by the mail-train from the North.

He slept at last, worn out with fatigue. It was late when he rose.

He found upon the breakfast-table a telegram, in the official envelope of the Electric Telegraph Company. The Snelgroves were business people accustomed to such communications: they were not surprised that a telegraphic message should have arrived for James Snelgrove; they concluded it had reference to affairs in Fenchurch Street.

It had been forwarded across the Mersey from the office of the Snelgroves in Liverpool.

It was sent to James Snelgrove from George Joyce, M.R.C.S., in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park villa, and was briefly worded: "Come back. Wife very ill. Dead child born this morning. Little hope of recovery."

From the time stated upon the telegram it was

clear that the message had been despatched some hours before Mr. Snelgrove's letter to his wife, posted overnight, could possibly have been received by her.

It was deemed by his cousins nothing extraordinary that James Snelgrove should desire to return forthwith to London. They had been long schooled to think that business *was* business, and must be attended to. Besides, his presence now was needless, until the funeral, six days later. He promised to return in time to take part in the obsequies of the late Joshua Snelgrove.

At the door of his house James Snelgrove encountered Mr. Joyce, the medical practitioner. His looks were grave, and he shook his head solemnly.

"I wish you'd been at hand," he said. "Not that you could have been of any use: everything possible has been done for our poor patient. Still, it's always a satisfaction to parties afterwards to think that they were at hand."

"She's ——" and Mr. Snelgrove stopped.

"Gradually sinking, I'm grieved to say, not a doubt of it—and delirious. I've been up with her

all night. I'm only going home now for a few minutes, just to shift my clothes; I shall be back directly. Quite a hopeless case, I fear."

"And—the letter I wrote last night?" This was breathlessly asked.

"I didn't hear of any letter," the doctor said indifferently. "But I'll be with you again in a few minutes."

Mr. Snelgrove entered his house. He found the servant crying.

"She's asleep just now, poor thing—worn out, quite."

Had any letter come? he asked.

She didn't know—she wasn't sure. Stay; she thought one had come. If so, it had been carried upstairs into her mistress's room, as usual.

Had she received it? had she read it? he asked himself. Why, it would kill her outright in her present state! How bitterly he repented having written it!

"How is she now, Mary?" Yet he could hardly force himself to attend to the servant's reply, he felt so giddy and bewildered.

"She ain't spoke a sensible word since she came home yesterday morning, and went off in a dead faint. She was light-headed after that. I went for Dr. Joyce, for I saw what was going to happen. She was quite raving most part of the night, poor soul. And to think that the dear little child—a boy it was, sir, born just on the stroke of three this morning—to think that it should never have drawn breath! It's enough to break any one's heart. And she'd so set her heart upon its being a boy!"

He went upstairs, trembling in all his limbs. He found his wife terribly changed, with a deathly look upon her face, asleep, breathing slowly and faintly, as though the task of life were almost beyond her strength. Was this pale shadow of a woman his Eliza, from whom he had escaped under such painful circumstances but a few hours before? He should not have known her! That a little time should have made so great a difference!

In an agony of alarm he glanced round the room, examined the top of the drawers, the

dressing-table, the mantel-piece—he could see no letter.

Then he sat down beside her bed, to await her wakening, or the return of the doctor. Heaven ! how slowly the minutes seemed to pass. Did ever man feel so wretched as he felt then ? He sat leaning forward, hiding his face in his hands, utterly miserable.

Presently he started ; she had moved, was awake, looking at him with strangely frightened, troubled eyes. Then a curious smile of tender recognition quivered upon her gray parched lips.

No word was spoken. He was bending over her. She raised herself partially, with his aid, and rested her head upon his shoulder, then buried her face in his breast. Once more there was love, and love only, between man and wife.

She was sensible again, and knew him. He took her hand in his, shivering as he did so, for he heard the crackling of paper, and perceived presently that she held the letter he had despatched from Liverpool the night before.

"Thank God!" he murmured. The seal of the letter was unbroken. Amid all the agony of the moment, he was nearly fainting with joy at this discovery.

"It's all over!" the doctor said solemnly, when he entered the room a little later.

She had died in her husband's arms, loved and forgiven, forgiving and loving him; knowing nothing of his cruelty—of the accident which had made him, in truth, *not* her husband, according to the strict letter of the law.

What cause he had to be thankful that, at any rate, remorse on *that score* was spared him! His sorrow, his penitence, was extreme and genuine. He began to feel now that the poor dead woman—with all her faults, and it has been fully shown that she had many—was yet dear to him. He began to feel that he would give much—very much—if she could but live again; if the events of the last few weeks, described in these pages, had never really been. For a time it seemed to him as if his happiness, and his every hope of happiness, had gone from him, absolutely, for ever.

He might have sung with the poet, but that he knew nothing of the lines:—

And I think in the lives of most women and men
There's a moment when all would go smooth and even,
If only the dead could find out when
To come back and be forgiven.

He still lives; still prosperous and busy, but sobered, saddened, and improved by this grave episode in his career.

AN ENGAGED MAN.



AN ENGAGED MAN.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE CLUB.

MR. BERTIE BOGER—"Old Boger" he was commonly called by his acquaintances, but this was behind his back—was to be seen daily about noon at his club, the Acropolis, in Piccadilly. He was wont for some hours to occupy a chair by the window in the morning-room of that institution, and to entertain himself with perusing the newspapers through his double gold-rimmed eye-glasses, with gazing intermittently at the passers-by in the street, and with many applications to his snuff-box; for he favoured the old-fashioned practice of snuff-taking, and reprobated the more prevalent modern

vice of smoking. Occasionally, too, he would interchange talk with his old friend Pettigrew, also a member of the Acropolis, and to be found very constantly within its halls at mid-day.

"What's the matter with old Boger?" one youthful member of the Acropolis inquired in a whisper of another youthful member. "He's been jumping about all the morning like a parched pea."

Mr. Boger had always set his face against the admission of young men into the club. He did not like them, he confessed. Such observations as the above—he had not heard it exactly, but he was conscious of the whisper, and suspected that he was the object of it—were not likely to commend youthful members to his favour. Still they were a necessity. Unhappily, the old members were apt to die off occasionally, though, to do them justice, they lingered in the club as long as they possibly could. Their places had to be filled: the club must have members. It could only be carried on after the usual method—by the receipt of entrance fees and yearly subscriptions. Indeed, for

all its splendour of aspect, the Acropolis, like many of its kindred institutions, was not too prosperous in regard to its financial position. Candidates for election were almost invariably young ; the mature and the senile were, of course, already settled as to their clubs. The thing was inevitable, therefore, but none the less distasteful to Mr. Boger, who, in regard to his juvenile co-members, felt much what a special jury may be supposed to feel when, owing to deficiency in their number, a *tales* is prayed, and a common juryman is allowed to join them in their box.

Still, on the morning under mention, Mr. Boger's manner was certainly disquieted, almost to the extent of justifying the irreverent criticism "that he jumped about like a parched pea." He wore an anxious look ; his eyes were restless ; his cheeks were flushed. He could not occupy himself with his newspaper, or find diversion in gazing from the window, after his usual composed placid fashion ; and his seat in his chair was as uneasy as though it had been the saddle of a high-mettled steed, and he an unpractised horseman, as indeed he happened

to be. He watched the door, moreover, with a nervous persistency. His face brightened at length, and he seemed to breathe more freely when he perceived the entrance of his friend Pettigrew.

"I am going to tell you something that will surprise you, Pettigrew," Mr. Boger said presently in a subdued yet important tone. Mr. Pettigrew looked rather as though he did not want to be surprised.

It may be noted that men generally find a curious sort of pleasure in exciting surprise. From an elevated position in the clouds, as it were, they are enabled, calm and unmoved the while, to cause and to contemplate the perturbation of their fellows. They are in the situation of a gunner engaged in discharging his ordnance, who has only to await the effect his shot may have upon the point towards which it is aimed, the effect itself being the concern of those who may find the cannon-ball suddenly in their midst. The drawback upon the delights of surprising consists, perhaps, chiefly in the fact that the people who are surprised are apt thereupon to abandon all restraint, and to speak

out very loudly and abruptly, their ejaculations being oftentimes distinguished further by a sincerity which may chance to be inconvenient and unpleasant.

"The fact is, my dear Pettigrew—it's a secret at present, and you're the first person I've mentioned it to, but—I'm going to be married!"

Pettigrew was certainly surprised. So far, Mr. Boger was fully satisfied. He watched with interest Pettigrew's start of amazement; the parting of his lips, until all his teeth became visible, some of them being plainly artificial; the lifting of his eyebrows, until his rather bald forehead became quite ploughed with wrinkles, and the general air of bewilderment and incredulity which possessed and convulsed him. Then he exclaimed abruptly: "You're never going to do anything so foolish!"

He was not a rude man as a rule; indeed, he prided himself, and with some show of reason, upon the polish and suavity of his speech and demeanour generally. But he was certainly rather rude upon the occasion in question. Mr. Boger, however, waived any objection on this account,

and contented himself with repeating his former statement.

“What! At *your* time of life?” cried Pettigrew.

Boger felt that this was rather too bad of Pettigrew. A man does not need to be reminded of his “time of life,” as it is called. There can be no need whatever for its being made a subject of remark. A man’s age is surely a matter between himself and his insurance office, and is possibly also the affair of those inquisitorial Government functionaries whose duty it is to take the census every ten years or so.

“Yes, at *my* time of life,” Mr. Boger said firmly. Therenpon Pettigrew whistled; without doubt, an indecorous thing to do at any time. Mr. Boger felt tempted to remonstrate upon this impropriety of conduct, when Pettigrew demanded suddenly: “How about Mrs. Kettlewell?” Mr. Boger did not appear to be prepared with a reply to that inquiry, and was silent.

Mrs. Kettlewell was in truth his landlady. He had for many years occupied a portion of her house

in Sackbut Place, a confined but perfectly genteel no-thoroughfare in the neighbourhood of the Acropolis. Mr. Boger had been for some time aware of a rumour current among his acquaintances, to the effect that he permitted himself to be much governed by Mrs. Kettlewell. He had not thought it expedient, however, to contradict or notice in any way a report he held to be utterly nonsensical.

Mr. Boger had enjoyed the pleasure of surprising his friend. On the other hand, he had endured the annoyance of Pettigrew's frank expressions of astonishment. Pettigrew had been thrown off his guard, had been brusque, perhaps even a little gross. It may be that he was himself vexed at the want of command over his feelings that he had manifested. He remained silent for some minutes; then he said with a more composed air than he had hitherto been able to assume: "And so you are really and truly going to be married!" This was not put as a question exactly, but rather as a tentative statement which he desired to have once more officially confirmed. Mr. Boger assured his friend that he had been speaking strictly of a

matter of fact. Mr. Pettigrew looked very grave. "You're a bold man, Boger," he said. Mr. Boger seemed not displeased to be thus credited with boldness.

"I suppose I ought to congratulate you," said Pettigrew with a deep sigh; and then he mumbled some formal phrases of compliment. Boger did not hear them distinctly, but took their purport for granted. His friend was understood to be well versed in the formulæ and etiquettes of social life. Boger did not doubt that, now that he had regained mastery over his emotions, Pettigrew's expressions were, at any rate in intent, of a becoming and appropriate kind.

Boger even found his hand warmly shaken by his old comrade. At first, he thought that Pettigrew was taking leave of him; but as he did not withdraw, it became evident that the performance was to be understood as part of the ceremony of congratulation. Boger wished that his friend's manner had been a little less severe and solemn, and bethought him that the chaplain at Newgate must shake hands with the capitally condemned

criminal on the scaffold in much the same awful and significant way. Probably Pettigrew did not intend to convey any so lugubrious a suggestion, however. Cockney wags might indulge in facetious association of matrimony with the final penalty of the law—with jocose confusion of the words *halter* and *altar*; and it was possible that Pettigrew, being a person of wide experience and information, might have become cognisant of some such feeble and contemptible drollery. But, clearly, he respected himself and the well-being of society too much to be chargeable in his own person with waggishness so unworthy.

He waited with an attentive air, as though expecting to be furnished with further information. The worst of it was, as Boger felt, that his expression was one of solicitude and melancholy. He was bent upon being pitiful and compassionate. It was plain that he regarded Boger as a person upon whom a very serious misfortune had suddenly fallen, and whose friends it behoved, therefore, to do their utmost in the way of comforting and condoling. Boger was in trouble, entirely owing to

his own misconduct, it was true; but still, an old associate of many years' standing, while holding his doings in severe reprehension, was bound not to desert him, but to afford the full benefit of his sympathy, at any rate. This was the position Pettigrew assumed, and Boger found it rather intolerable. He would greatly have preferred his friend being jocose on the occasion, and rallying him humorously, in moderation, of course, on the change of life he had planned, and the secrecy he had maintained in regard to his intentions. "I should not care," thought Boger, "if his jests were ever so old, and worn, and conventional—anything would be preferable to his present gloomy and dispiriting air. It was hard to tell my love affair—for such it is—to Pettigrew, in any case; but in his present rueful mood, it's really dreadful; he seems so determined to look at the matter in its worst possible point of view. It has its grave aspect, no doubt; but in *his* eyes, its every aspect is grave. I begin to wish that I had not mentioned the thing at all—that I had foregone wholly the pleasure of surprising Pettigrew. Still, some time or

other, he must have learned it, and it's best that he should hear it direct from me."

Mr. Boger cleared his voice, and made one or two ineffectual attempts to enter upon a brief narration of the circumstances that had led to his engagement; but his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth. He experienced a curious difficulty in finding words in which to express himself. Pettigrew's rather fish-like eyes, as he sat motionless awaiting information, seemed to glare upon him blankly with a paralysing kind of effect.

"Any money?" Pettigrew inquired at length. He was weary of the continued silence. He desired to plunge into the middle of the matter, since his friend hesitated so much about its commencement. Perhaps he wanted to have done with the thing, and get to his usual morning's work with the newspapers. Besides, Boger's conduct was at present wholly unintelligible to him. He was casting about for some reasonable explanation of it. If he could be satisfied that the future Mrs. Boger was possessed of wealth, the case would come more within the radius of

his comprehension. He would then "see his way." At present, he did not see it at all. "Any money?"

"She has no money," said Boger.

Pettigrew's jaw dropped. He clearly thought that Boger was out of his mind.

"I'm not a fortune-hunter—I never was one," urged Boger, with apparent annoyance at the expression of his friend's face. "I could never condescend to marry for money. Rich or poor, she would be the same to me."

"Precisely—precisely—of course; no doubt," Pettigrew answered with that promptness of acquiescence noticeable in the attendants in lunatic asylums, who always shrink from opposing or contradicting the assertions, however fatuous and extravagant of the patients committed to their care, lest they should become irritated or excited to a dangerous extent.

It was evident, however, as Boger thought, that he was yet regarded as by no means beyond the reach of mercenary and sordid motives, even in relation to so serious a step as marriage. Not

that Pettigrew held such motives, probably, to be deserving of unqualified censure.

"Young?" he next inquired.

Boger made avowal that the lady was but nineteen years of age. Pettigrew protruded his chin by way of comment on this statement. He seemed to think it the worst thing he had yet heard. Boger's union with a young wife struck him as preposterous. In favour of marriage with a lady of mature years—a widow, possibly, in prosperous circumstances, with all silly romantic notions shaken from her by the storms of life, as the blossom is stripped from a tree by the wind, armed against the world, and prepared to give it no quarter, the while she would be prompt to take all she could get from it: a woman of experience and practical ideas, in fine, without exalted expectations on any subject—in favour of such a marriage, there might be something to be urged—something "to go to the jury," as lawyers have it. Pettigrew's notion of a wife was: an aid to a man's selfishness; one who would care for his interests, and promote his comforts—and, of

course, her own, too, for that couldn't well be prevented; a nurse during his hours of illness, and a housekeeper who would rigidly check needless expenditure; would see that the cook did her duty; that the tradespeople were not inordinately fraudulent; and that the house-linen was properly aired—such was Pettigrew's idea of a perfect partner.

At the same time, so far as he was concerned, he held it so impossible to secure the services of any one thoroughly competent to discharge the duties in question, that it was preferable to avoid risk in the matter, and to bear the ills of his present condition with such complacency and fortitude as he could command. For youth—in a wife or otherwise—he was incredulous of its charms. He had arrived at a time of life when youth is a very distant, and seems rather a contemptible thing. To him, youth signified folly. How could he be asked to respect, or to desire, or to sympathise with folly?

“Name?” he demanded presently with abrupt-

ness ; for he felt that his temper had been severely tried, his patience unduly taxed.

Mr. Boger whispered that the young lady's name was Lupus—Julia Lupus.

Pettigrew shook his head. Plainly, he did not like the name. "Lupuses of Hertfordshire ?" he asked.

Mr. Boger thought not. Mr. Lupus, the father, was of Maida Vale—a medical man.

Pettigrew said "Pooh !" It was manifest that he had no opinion whatever of Maida Vale, and did not esteem medical men. He rose and tugged at his gloves. Then he asked again, with some spitefulness in his tone and glance, "How about Mrs. Kettlewell ?"

Mr. Boger looked hurt, but held his peace.

"I say again, you're a bold man, Boger. Good morning."

He quitted the Acropolis abruptly, without stopping to glance even at the newspapers. He had the air of one who felt himself trifled with—aggrieved—outraged.

"Boger's a fool," he said, and he intensified the remark by adding an oath to it. And as he passed down Piccadilly, there was a kind of irritated strut in his walk, and he scowled scornfully at the world.

CHAPTER II.

A SERIOUS BUSINESS.

MR. BOGEE rang for a glass of dry sherry; he needed refreshment and support. He was not angry at his friend's behaviour; he was in too humble a mood perhaps to feel angry; he was dejected and cowed. He had hoped—it may be a little against hope—for better treatment at the hands of Pettigrew. "If our positions were reversed," he mused, "I should not have conducted myself towards Pettigrew as he has conducted himself towards me. I think—nay, I am sure—that I should have been more composed, more considerate. I should have controlled my feelings more effectually. But I was wrong, perhaps, to take him so completely by surprise; I ought to have broken my news more gradually. Pettigrew

has aged a good deal of late; I don't know any man who shows his years more than he does. There's a sort of senile petulance come over him of late that's really curious; because, after all, he's not so many years older than I am. Well, well, one must make allowances. But he's a good fellow in the main: no doubt he'll be sorry by-and-by for this little display of temper; and I'm glad I've told him, at any rate; even if I did it clumsily—it's something off my mind. He'll get more reconciled to the notion in time; and the thing need affect our friendship in no way. I might see quite as much of him as I do now. He will like Julia: Julia will like him. He will always be welcome at my house. My marriage may be even an advantage to him: it will open a comfortable and pleasant household to him. He'll not marry now, of course, himself. Pettigrew's marrying, at his time of life, and with his way of thinking, would be too good a joke! Still, he need not have been quite so hard upon another man — a younger man — taking unto himself a wife."

Mr. Boger sipped his sherry, and endeavoured to take a cheerful view of his position. He was not too successful. Beneath his self-congratulatory reflections there was a sediment of thought of an acrid and unpleasant flavour, evidence of adulteration and detrimental admixture.

"It's a serious business, of course," he pondered. "I don't dispute *that*. Marriage always *is* a serious business; and the older one grows, and the longer one defers it, the more serious it becomes. I'm not so young—not nearly so young, I admit—as I have been; and one's courage doesn't increase as one advances in years. We flatter ourselves oftentimes that we are prudent, when, if we were to say cowardly, we should more correctly describe the state of the case. We descant upon the rashness of the young, but occasionally the timidity of the elders might also form the subject of our observations. I know I wish I had something of the precipitancy and indiscretion of youth. I am suffering from my acquired habit of circumspection. I contemplate the step I am about to take with much

nervousness and misgiving. Over and over again I assure myself that marriage is a great responsibility. Were I a young man—that is, a much younger man—it would be different. I should be hopeful, elated, fearless, enthusiastic. I should be absolutely regardless of the opinions of others. Pettigrew would be nobody: his sentiments nothing to me. I should hold on my course, supremely satisfied as to its correctness, convinced that it was the only course possible to me. In the fire of my passion, all considerations antagonistic to it would be withered up and destroyed. My impetuosity would mow down everything in its path. But now, all is otherwise. I am nervous, timorous, anxious. I turn to Pettigrew, in hopes that he will lighten me of my cares; will take a more cheerful view of my situation; will comfort me, and back me up, as it's called. But he does nothing of the kind. His tone is gloomy in the extreme; his opinion is one of deep despondency. He thinks marriage to be even a greater responsibility than I think it—the most serious business in the world, indeed—that's Pettigrew's opinion.

I look about for support—for a stick, as it were, to lean upon—I find Pettigrew: he gives way directly; totters, and curves, and twists under me like a halfpenny cane. In fact, he's of no sort of service to me; he lets me down altogether: reduces me to a worse state than ever."

Something to the above effect, if not precisely in the above phrases, ran Mr. Boger's meditations; and gradually he brought himself into a most depressed condition of mind. He was obliged to ring for a second glass of sherry; but even the sherry, it seemed to him, wanted flavour, or body, or age, or smacked of acidity, or was otherwise, on that particular morning, objectionable, and unlike the customary sherry of the Acropolis. His only consolation consisted in forcibly directing his reflections towards his Julia; while yet there occurred to him a suspicion of something ludicrous lurking in the fact of his—Bertie Boger's (Bertie to be pronounced Bartie, if you please)—being so placed in relation to a young lady, not his wife, as to be bound to describe her as *his* Julia—*his* peculiarly, and none other's.

CHAPTER III.

HIS JULIA.

How had she come to be *his* Julia? He was, of course, old enough to be her father, without need, in such case, of supposing him invested with parental responsibilities at a very youthful period of his career. He had only recently made her acquaintance; but to certain members of her family he had been well known long years ago. He had been at school with George Lupus, her father; had been his intimate associate when he was pursuing his medical studies, was "walking the hospitals," and afterwards acting as assistant in the surgery of old Joshua Bates of Bedford Row, the well-known general practitioner. Upon the marriage of George Lupus with Miss Amelia Bates, since deceased, Bertie Boger had officiated

as "best man." Luples had afterwards quitted England in the capacity of army surgeon, and had passed many years of his life in the West Indies. Boger lost sight of him. For a while they had kept up a correspondence; but this had gradually drooped, and at last had expired altogether. Luples was too busy to write letters; Boger, perhaps, too idle. They had met again by the merest accident quite recently upon Brighton pier. Time had been busy with the personal aspect of both, and they had some difficulty in recognising each other. They renewed their old friendship. Luples had saved money, had bought a practice, and settled at Maida Vale. Boger went to dine with him one Sunday, and was introduced to his friend's only child, Julia Luples. After that first visit he ate many dinners at the hospitable Maida Vale villa. And he fell in love with Julia.

"Falling in love" is, of course, a conventional expression. Mr. Boger being no longer young, and now carrying much flesh upon his figure, did not permit himself to fall from a great height, or to a great depth. He felt that such an exploit

course, her own, too, for that couldn't well be prevented; a nurse during his hours of illness, and a housekeeper who would rigidly check needless expenditure; would see that the cook did her duty; that the tradespeople were not inordinately fraudulent; and that the house-linen was properly aired—such was Pettigrew's idea of a perfect partner.

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trimming, and attractive appliances of dishing and serving up. It resembled a roast leg of mutton on its second day. The hot viand in its integrity had been set before the Emily of long ago. She seemed a vague creature now, contemplated through the mist of years; she had been a formidable actual personage then, gifted with keen teeth and a hearty appetite. She had made havoc of that whole hot joint—had indeed cut cruelly into it, according to Boger; so that now it was but to a warmed-up, hashed, minced sort of repast he could invite Miss Luples. It was something, indeed, that a dead-cold dish was not proffered her; but he had been careful, as he believed, to provide fare of a kind sufficiently attractive, besides being wholesome and nutritious.

For Julia Luples was of a calm nature—placid, collected, impassive. She was very handsome, with regular features, steady blue eyes, full throat, deep chest, with rich cables of yellow hair, knotted firmly at the back of her well-shaped stately head, of large statuesque frame, without sharp corners or edges—

all beautifully rounded off, polished and finished—a superb *blonde* indeed. She was accomplished—could play and sing admirably—only “wanting soul,” announced Signor Staccato, her musical preceptor, to be a pianist and vocalist of distinction. What did “soul” mean or matter? Mr. Boger asked himself, listening to that full limpid contralto voice, or watching the limber movements of those shapely hands upon the keyboard. They were not small hands—she was not a small woman; Boger found that he agreed with Byron on the subject of female stature—but then they were always exquisitely white, and soft and cool. Welcoming her father’s friend, her hand rested in his for a moment with the cold unresisting downiness of the body of a dead dove. She painted in water-colours, she embroidered, she was skilled in all kinds of needlecraft; and if little enthusiasm marked her labours in these respects, there was an abundant industry. She was a great reader, too, of all sorts of books, never permitting her constitutional serenity to be disturbed, however, by the most stimulating of literary efforts. She

was not a great talker. "One doesn't want a woman to be always chattering, you know," Mr. Boger had said in depreciation of any possible impeachment of his Julia's conversational powers. She took the head of her father's table, and fulfilled the functions of hostess with ease, grace, and address. She was always perfectly self-possessed, and always marvellously cool. It did not seem that she could have been frightened or made to faint or to scream by any mortal power. She would have been mistress of herself though China had fallen ten times over. In fine, she seemed to Bertie Boger to be just the kind of woman he might love deliberately at his age—to whom he might safely intrust his happiness, his dignity, and his name. "A younger man wouldn't understand—wouldn't appreciate her; she's above all the fire-and-flame nonsense of the youthful lover. Her sterling sense and beautiful tranquillity of demeanour would be all thrown away upon him. No; she's for his betters—for one of experience and position—who knows the world and its ways—a man of some substance, and discretion, and—and

years—in fact, for—myself.” Mr. Boger’s addresses were received by Miss Lupus with what might possibly be cordial affection, though it certainly looked rather like apathy. Still, it was generally understood that he was her accepted suitor.

His old friend, George Lupus, Mr. Boger found, as their renewed intimacy proceeded, to be less improved by lapse of time than could have been desired. In truth, Mr. Lupus came as near to being a bore—so Boger confessed to himself—as was possible to one who was the father of Julia. Lupus was not the better, but rather the worse, for his long expatriation. “It is with men as with wine,” thought Boger; “not all are improved by travel, by keeping, by voyages to the Indies, East or West. The experiment has not answered with Lupus. He was an inferior vintage, so to speak; and travel has only thickened, muddled, shaken him up, and soured him. He’d have been more palatable, perhaps, if he’d been kept quietly at home; though in any case, perhaps, he wouldn’t have been good for much.” Lupus was a proser. He was what is called “long-winded.” He was for ever hammering

out commonplace topics to an infinite extent. His every blow spread his subject over a larger superficies—made it more inconvenient to handle; but not more valuable—its original worth having been inappreciably small. He was prone to dwell laboriously upon old times and old associations, straining his powers of memory, and wasting his sentimental resources prodigiously. Was it likely that Bertie Boger, situated as he was in regard to Julia, would care to honour these repeated draughts upon his recollection, even supposing him to have had in hand the necessary means? “Why, he would make me out to be a perfect Methuselah!” Boger said to himself, with a shiver of anguish, and an alarmed glance at Julia, when his old friend begged him to recollect events that had happened ten, twenty, thirty, nay, forty years back. “You must surely remember, Boger—gad, it seems to me that it was only yesterday; we were gay young bucks both of us in those days! It was in the year *one*—or could it have been *two?*”—and so on. Luples unrolled an endless coil of memories, as a conjurer at a fair draws a long snake from his

bosom. Certainly, it was not pleasant for the lover of Julia; the moment was ill chosen for reminding him of and revealing the full flight of years that had passed over his head. He wished to be seen at his youngest; his friend was bent upon exposing him at his oldest. "The worst of bores is the bore blessed or cursed with a memory; who *will* smother us under a great feather-bed of old reminiscences and associations. So morbidly active a recollection as Lupus's *must* mean softening of the brain; and it *isn't* recollection really; it's half imagination and invention. Confound Lupus and his legends of the past! What will Julia think of me?" So Boger meditated, twiddling his wine-glass uncomfortably, a cold dew damping his worn brow.

Lupus had also grievances to recount and descant upon. Besides being a bore with a memory, he was a bore with a wrong. He had been treated badly—infernally, he said—when "in the service." He inveighed bitterly against the Government; his profession had been slighted—he himself had been personally insulted. According to his account, the climate of the West Indies had been especially

contrived with a view to his annoyance and injury. It is needless to set forth LUPUS's account of his troubles, or the reader might find himself as much afflicted as was BOGER by the narration of them. It was a vague, dreary, wordy, rambling recital. Even BOGER never fairly comprehended it; he only knew for certain that LUPUS had brought back with him from the West Indies two especial things: hatred of the black man, and fondness for rum. In regard to the black man, BOGER had no opinions. Rum disagreed with him gravely. Still, he humoured LUPUS in the matter of his favourite drink. He followed his host's example, and swallowed tumblers of rum: diluted, of course, with hot water, and flavoured with lemon and sugar. The dyspeptic agonies BOGER subsequently underwent must not be dwelt upon. Still, LUPUS was JULIA's father. BOGER's situation constrained him to commend himself as best he could to the favour of both parent and child. He drained his glass—even had it replenished; and suffered accordingly.

It must be said for LUPUS, however, that in

intention, at any rate, he was thoroughly kind and hospitable; that he gave of his best, and that his entertainments at the Maida Vale villa had their attractions. He was hardly to be censured for urging upon his guest consumption of the drink that was the most esteemed by his own palate.

When, as we have seen, to Pettigrew's contempt, he had been informed by Boger that Julia Lupus had no money, the circumstances of her position had been in some measure understated. It was true that Julia in her own right was not possessed of fortune; still, there could be no question that upon the demise of her father, such property as he owned would devolve upon her, absolutely; and, it has been already mentioned, Lupus had saved money, invested partly in the purchase of his practice. Moreover, he had acquired funds by inheritance, successful speculation, and otherwise. He was generally understood to be, not rich exactly, but, for a professional man, in fairly affluent circumstances. It was not clear, however, that he was prepared to disintegrate his property during

his lifetime, or make any liberal settlement upon the marriage of his daughter.

"At my death, you know, she'll take her chance," he had said to Boger, late one night, in a moment of confidence not uninfluenced by Jamaica rum. "She'll get all there is—every stick—and there'll be tidy picking, when I'm gone, all things considered; though I say it perhaps that shouldn't. A girl might have less, at any rate. Before that event comes off, and as long as George Lupus keeps clear of the undertaker—well—much won't be done for her. Still, I'm a fair man, Boger; no one ever dared to say that George Lupus wasn't upright and straightforward in his dealings. (Help yourself.) I'll tell you what it is: I've always maintained that a father ought not to make a profit by his daughter. (Have another tumbler. Bless you, there isn't a headache in a gallon of it! It's real West Indian, this is; I ought to know; I've drunk enough of it.) When Julia marries, I'll make a calculation to a fraction of what she costs me—her dress, her keep, everything—and I'll allow her every farthing of that sum, and pay it quarterly,

punctually. You can't keep a girl like that—not in the condition she is—for nothing. You can't dress a girl like that—not in the silks she wears—for nothing. You're not a family man, Boger, and you don't understand these things; but, take my word for it, you can't do it under a trifle. Well, every farthing she costs me I'll pay over while I'm above ground; more I don't undertake to do—she must wait till the old man's gone aloft. Now, you're not going without another cigar. Don't be a milksop, Boger!"

The guest had his sufferings after these evenings at the villa of the Lupuses.

CHAPTER IV.

GOOD ADVICE.

BOGER read his newspapers, hardly with his usual care: a strange volatility affected his mind; he could not fix his attention; his thoughts were for ever winging away from the Acropolis to Maida Vale. He took his usual afternoon stroll down Piccadilly, and entered the Park. Leaning over the railing of the Row, sucking the silver knob of his bamboo cane, with an expression that was half contemplative, half vacuous, he again met Pettigrew. The friends renewed converse.

"You must dine with me, Boger. We must have champagne. It doesn't agree with me ever, but the occasion demands it. We must drink *her* Health! I must wish you joy. I am an old fellow

now, but it shan't be said that Tom Pettigrew was a man who failed to back his friend, or to stand by him, or to do the right thing under the circumstances. The dinner shall be a good one. God bless you, Boger! I'll see you through this business."

Boger felt that this was kindly and well said of Pettigrew. He murmured gratitude. He had known all along that Pettigrew would assert himself—would *be* himself, in fact—when it came to the point. He was like an old wine, that needed a little humouring, to be left by itself in a pleasant temperature with the cork drawn, in order that its merits might be manifested and have due justice rendered them.

"I've been thinking over what you told me, Boger. You're a bold man, as I said, and you're making a sacrifice—you're risking a good deal."

"Marriage is always a sacrifice in some sort—always a risk," said Boger with a kind of selfish sententiousness. It was noticeable that as Pettigrew's sentiments warmed on the subject of marriage, Boger's cooled; so that altogether, between

them, an equable atmosphere of sageness, not to say cynicism, was still maintained.

"It's a speculation, no doubt," said Pettigrew; "it's a serious investment of capital. I can only hope you'll get an excellent dividend out of it—that it will return you a handsome annuity of happiness."

"I'm reasonable, Pettigrew. My expectations are not extravagantly pitched."

"Still, the thing's creditable to your spirit of enterprise, Boger. I respect your courage. I own I couldn't do it myself—I haven't the pluck; but then"—this was said rather with a relapse into gloominess—"I never was venturesome. I've nothing of the gambler about me. I always held back from the mildest kind of punting. I could never bring myself to stake even a crown at the tables."

"I really think, you know, that the odds are rather in my favour."

"Well, that's as it may be." Then, after a pause, Pettigrew asked: "You've told Mrs. Kettlewell?"

Boger's face clouded. Why this allusion to Mrs.

Kettlewell? He was tempted to exclaim abruptly: "Bother Mrs. Kettlewell!" However, he contented himself with saying simply: "No, not yet; but I shall do so, of course, when the proper time arrives."

"She knows nothing? She has no suspicions?"

"I think not."

"Then, take my advice, Boger; don't tell her!"

"You don't suppose that I'm afraid of her?"

"My dear Boger, mark my words: every man of your years is always more or less afraid of his housekeeper."

"It's absurd, Pettigrew—really absurd. What can it matter to her? She won't like it, I dare-say."

"She won't, certainly."

"But she can't prevent it. Surely I'm a free agent—I'm at liberty to please myself?"

"Take my advice; get married first, and—tell her of it afterwards."

"What! marry on the sly—like a schoolboy?"

"Yes; do anything—*bolt*, if need be—but, don't tell her."

“Absurd!”

“She’s a dangerous woman. Don’t trifle with
Mrs. Kettlewell.”

“Quite absurd!”

“You’ll see!”

CHAPTER V.

MRS. KETTLEWELL.

Mrs. KETTLEWELL's house in Sackbut Place, Mayfair, was small, and dark, and close. Its only recommendation was its situation. It was near everything that, from a genteel and fashionable point of view, was to be desired—but it was bordered on all sides by mews, and smelt accordingly. But then these were occupied, not by common cattle and vehicles, but by the horses and carriages of the aristocracy. No doubt that made a difference.

Mr. Boger occupied the first floor. His apartments consisted of a sitting-room, bed-chamber, and dressing-closet. He was at home generally but to sleep at night, and to breakfast in the morning. The rest of the day he passed at the Acropolis an

in Society, returning to Sackbut Place only occasionally to repair or renovate his costume. A faithful attendant came every morning to shave him and to dress his hair. He was proud of his hair, and with some reason: it was his own, and was abundant. It was the physical gift that had the most resolutely withstood the attacks of time. It was the Old Guard, indeed, of the army of his personal attractions. I scorn to pun upon the word dye: it may be that the juvenile hue of his locks owed something to cunningly prepared washes and lotions, but otherwise his hair had certainly not surrendered. It was the envy and the marvel of his contemporaries, who had long since become, to a man, bald, gray, or be-wigged. But Bertie's curls could still boast a youthful luxuriance; the tongs gave them curve and crispness, and the pomatum-pot, discreetly resorted to, afforded them gloss. If he could only have been as young all over as his hair looked! But he wasn't. Age had unsymmetrically extended his contour: there was a creased convexity about his waistcoat; his legs had bulged at the knee, and moved beneath the weight

of his body unreadily and crazily. His closely reaped cheeks had joined partnership with his neck—a large amount of fat and flesh representing the capital of the firm—and his faded glassy eyes were bordered by a rich arabesque setting of wrinkles. He could still boast, however, a florid rubescent complexion, and with his small well-shaped features, their plump surroundings, and ample retinue of chins, had the aspect of a veteran Cherub, or a Cupid (Love is the oldest of the gods, looking at his years) retired from business on a comfortable pension.

His life had not been harmful or blameworthy, perhaps, except in as much as it had been absolutely idle and useless. He had never done a stroke of work, or earned a single sixpence, in the whole course of his existence. On his coming of age, he had inherited a considerable income, which he had devoted scrupulously to his own gratification. He had preferred to expend it upon enjoyment, rather than to augment it by labour. He had never been in debt, and from his own point of view had never been extravagant. He had only benefited his fellow-

creatures in that he had never hoarded his means. If the disbursement of his annuity could do them good—well, he had always punctually disbursed it: but invariably upon himself, as a bachelor addicted to social pleasures, and with some pretension to be accounted a man of fashion. Dress, dinners, sunshine, snuff—on these had been his main outlay—such had been the programme of his being. It did not seem a very exemplary one, viewed from the height of years. His past life of exhausted pleasures was but as a dust-heap—a pile of empty and broken bottles—quite valueless; and as an object of contemplation, unattractive, depressing. His future was to be different, however. It was to be shared, adorned, redeemed from reproach, by Julia Lupus.

His indolence and selfishness apart, he was not unamiable. He was indeed polite, kind-hearted, humane, and liberally disposed. But he was by nature very timorous. To this fact was to be attributed much of the inactivity and egotism that had characterised his life. He shrank from trouble—from participation in the labours of his fellows—

and gradually came to centre, more and more, his cares and thoughts in himself, out of mere lack of courage to make effort and to endure. "I must keep out of it" was his first notion, when he perceived any stir or action going on in the world. There are men who cannot be restrained from leaping into the arena, no matter what conflict may be raging in it—how little it may concern them, or how great may be the odds against them. They *must* be doing, in any case. Boger was not of these; he was essentially a non-combatant. Let the din of arms be never so distant, it was always his first impulse to run away; his second to lock himself in the cellar. So he had passed his days; not wholly without self-reproaches, or a suspicion that the philosophy of fear which he had permitted to govern him—which sways, indeed, more amongst us than we could readily reckon, or would care to allow—had its disadvantages. Still, he had been true to his creed—had avoided responsibility as a worker, as a husband and head of a household. Now in these later times there had gleamed within him a sort of brief Indian summer of youthful

ardour, and inclination to be venturesome. Doubtfully, even painfully, he had wooed Julia Luples, and, it was generally agreed, had won her.

Let it be further added, in palliation of Boger's selfish economy of life, that he was absolutely without what are known as "belongings." He was alone in the world—the last of the Bogers. No poor relation had claims upon him: no distant connection could feel aggrieved by Boger's system of expenditure. If ever man was entitled to pay away his money exactly as he chose, Boger was certainly so entitled.

In regard to his engagement, he was himself surprised at it, as much as anyone. He was puzzled, sometimes, at the courage he must have exhibited in effecting it. How could he have acquired such fortitude? Was it due to the hospitalities of Maida Vale, strangely nerving his heart and brain? He could not say. The thing was done, at any rate. He was an engaged man. Still, he felt that the old proverb about the first step was not unimpeachable. He had other steps to take which would cost him a good deal—quite

as much, even. He surveyed with trepidation the work before him ; to his outburst of courage had succeeded serious apprehensions. There was Mrs. Kettlewell !

Pettigrew had been curiously persistent in regard to Mrs. Kettlewell, and Pettigrew was a person of sense and experience. Men relied upon his judgment. However strongly he himself had spoken on the subject, Boger felt moved by what Pettigrew had said as to Mrs. Kettlewell.

" Not tell her ? " mused Boger : " it would be ridiculous—it would be mean. I must tell her, of course. It will be bad news for her ; she will think it so, no doubt. Still, she must be told. She won't like losing a lodger who has been with her now for a great many years ; it will be a loss to her to have these rooms empty—it will make a considerable difference in her income. But she will soon let them again ; rooms in such an excellent situation are seldom long unlet. A new tenant will seem strange, perhaps even distasteful, to her at first. He may give much more trouble than I do. One of those racketty young men, who abound so in the

present day, would be very bad for her, and for the house. He may be less considerate—less eligible in every way—though I say it, than I am. Still, she would soon get used to him: people soon get used to things. It won't be half so bad for her as she'll think it at first. And, of course, I shouldn't think of dealing unhandsomely with her in the matter; she has always been so attentive, has taken so much trouble to care for and please me, that on my leaving I shall certainly—remember her. The occasion demands that she should receive a little present at my hands. I don't mind going so far as to say that I am prepared to draw her a cheque for really a handsome amount, as a mark of my esteem and gratitude, in fact. And I should make a point of calling upon her afterwards, from time to time, to see how she's getting on: she'll find me by no means forgetful of her services."

Still, Mr. Boger was not easy in his mind. It occurred to him that the task of announcing and explaining to Mrs. Kettlewell his intended marriage had its difficulties and embarrassments. He kept on arranging the terms in which he should

state his news, and then pictured to himself the expression of her face, and the gestures she would employ thereupon. In his fancy, he determined exactly the ejaculations and phrases she would resort to. Altogether, the result of this imaginative effort was not pleasant.

"‘A dangerous woman’—that was how Pettigrew described her: a strong way of putting the case—too strong, perhaps. She might make herself disagreeable; lose her temper a little; but not more than that, I should think. Still, that would be enough. But, for ‘dangerous;’ why, what could she do? Nothing, of course. It’s monstrous to suppose there’s any real difficulty or danger in the matter.”

Mr. Boger shivered, however, as he wished his communication to Mrs. Kettlewell made, and all well. He did not think of adopting Pettigrew’s counsel, and of “bolting;” still, he wished himself clear of Sackbut Place. He lost some days irresolutely considering the question, and fretting a good deal over it.

At last, with a sort of abrupt timidity, and

in a curiously hollow tone, he addressed his house-keeper. "I'm thinking of making a change, Mrs. Kettlewell."

"Do, sir; it will do you good," she replied: "change is always beneficial. And I've been noticing that you've hardly looked yourself, of late. And I don't think you've ever quite shook off that attack of gout you had in the autumn. Dear me, how anxious I was about you ! For days and nights I hardly had my things off, or got so much as a wink of sleep. Try a week at Brighton, Mr. Boger. Be persuaded."

It was clear that she didn't in the least understand him.

"I was not thinking of Brighton, Mrs. Kettlewell."

"Then, say Margate, sir. It's not genteel, I know, but it's uncommon bracing; and at this time of year, you know, you don't have the riff-raff there you do later. I've heard parties speak very highly of Margate. It would do wonders for you, I'm sure, Mr. Boger."

"No—not Margate, Mrs. Kettlewell," Boger murmured faintly.

"Well, sir, wherever you think best, of course; it will be the same to me. And I'll make a point of going down with you, to see that everything's nice and comfortable. They're dreadful careless at some of those sea-side places. The parties I've known that has catched their deaths through being put into damp sheets! And so ill as you've been, sir! I couldn't hear of your going alone; for you ain't well, not nearly well, yet, Mr. Boger, though you may think you are. It was only yesterday I was saying to Sarah how ill you looked; you seemed to totter, like, as you went down the street—quite the old man, I said, if you'll excuse me, sir. It's that illness still clinging about you. And you ain't half careful enough, sir: people as is on in years, as I may say, sir, really can't be too careful, you know. And you so ill as you were in the autumn! I'm sure I didn't seem as if I could answer for you from one day to another; and all night long I dreamed of nothing but hearsees and ostrich

plumes, and undertakers' men about the place ! The turn it gave me, when I found a winding-sheet in the candle, and a coffin jumped out of the fireplace ! And your affairs not settled ; no will made—no nothing. However, you pulled through it somehow, thank goodness. Not that you're well yet, Mr. Boger—you mustn't think it : you're terrible shaken, sir. A illness such as that isn't to be got over all in a day : especially by those as is older than they have been."

Mr. Boger decided upon deferring the disclosure to Mrs. Kettlewell of his plan of marriage.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUETOUT COAT.

THERE was a moody, discomfited expression upon Boger's face as he walked up and down his room. A very few paces brought him from the window to the wall; a very few paces brought him back again from the wall to the window. It was a confined apartment, furnished after a dull, faded, old-world sort of fashion. Time and grime had dimmed it a good deal. The ceilings were clouded and cracked; the gilt frames of the foggy-brown oil-paintings—in which the *oscuro* greatly prevailed over the *chiaro*—were speckled and chipped; the carpet was threadbare, its colours and pattern faint and blurred by long wear; fusty drab-hued moreen festoons in front of the windows collected dust and obscured the light. Mr. Boger had

never before found his surroundings so murky and cheerless.

"I couldn't have stayed here much longer, in any case," he said, "even if I hadn't met Julia. It's been a mistake of mine staying here year after year—a great mistake. I never meant to do so when I first took the rooms. A man should always change his lodgings every six months or so, otherwise he seems to sink into a rut he can't easily lift himself out of again; he becomes the slave of habit and routine; people establish claims upon him, and think they've acquired a sort of vested interest in him. The world was open to me. I could have found a hundred places that would have suited me just as well. And I should have been spared all this absurd difficulty with Mrs. Kettlewell."

As Boger glanced round the room he felt he hated it and everything it contained, from the cracked china ornaments upon the mantelpiece down to the rickety case of mouldy stuffed birds on the chiffonier.

"Confound the woman!" he muttered fiercely;

"what does she mean by talking to me in that way? She'd make me out to be quite in my dotage. How dare she talk about accompanying me to the sea-side? And what was that she said about my affairs not being settled and my will not being made? It was really very impudent of her. She'd kill me before my time. I was ill, of course—very ill in the autumn; but there was no absolute danger. Simmons told me so himself; and there isn't a more trustworthy medical attendant in all London. 'Quite the old man,' she said. It was monstrous impudent. But I've allowed her too much license. I ought to have checked this kind of thing long ago. I've noticed of late that she permits herself great liberties in her manner of addressing me. What right has she to talk to me about my being 'on in years?' None whatever. It's an infernal liberty! Not a doubt of it. Mrs. Kettlewell forgets her position—our relative positions. It's quite insufferable. I've been too good-natured—vastly too easy and forbearing with her. She knows how easy I am—how disinclined to object and make difficulties

about matters, and she takes advantage of it. But she'll find she's at the end of her tether. I'm not so weak as she fancies me. I'm sorry I ever saw the woman's face."

He was greatly disturbed. He began again to think of what Pettigrew had said in relation to Mrs. Kettlewell—his warnings and forebodings about her. Still he was disposed, to maintain that Pettigrew had adopted exaggerated views on the subject. "For, after all," he argued, "it's a very simple business. I give her notice, and I quit my lodgings in due course, just as any other lodger might do."

Still he was haunted by vague suggestions that the matter was not quite so simple as he had stated it to be; that he was not exactly as other lodgers, nor Mrs. Kettlewell as other landladies. The question of time had undoubtedly to be taken into account. He had remained for long years under Mrs. Kettlewell's roof; and she had taken peculiar care of him—had nursed him in sickness, had attended to his caprices, and considered his needs and interests in a remarkable manner. Their re-

lations had not been those of the ordinary lodger and lodging-house keeper. No mother—so common talk had it—could have tended a sick son, no wife an invalid husband, with more anxious zeal than Mrs. Kettlewell had manifested towards Boger in his hours of illness. In this and in other ways she had acquired influence over him of an especial kind. He was timid and passive; she was bold and active. Gradually the weaker spirit had succumbed, had suffered itself to be almost enslaved by the stronger. He liked to be spared trouble; she was fond of taking trouble. His indolence was the opportunity of her industry. She would suffer him at last to do nothing for himself. She made herself so useful to him that it was not surprising she should come to think herself quite indispensable to him. She knew of all his movements, she acquainted herself with all his affairs, examined his papers, conned his banker's pass-book, read the letters he received, and, when possible, those he despatched also. She decided what clothes he should don, and, as far as might be, what food he should consume. Her sway over

him had grown so gradually and imperceptibly, that he was hardly himself conscious how absolute it was. His friends—Pettigrew in particular—had frequently rallied him upon the state of “petticoat government,” as they termed it, to which he had submitted himself. He had replied again and again that their allusions were quite unwarrantable. Yet occasionally, when he ventured to consider the matter, it must have occurred to him that the remarks in question were not so wholly absurd as he desired to think them.

And this became thoroughly apparent to him now that the duty had devolved upon him of acquainting Mrs. Kettlewell with his purposed change of life. For the first time he felt inclined to admit that he was really afraid of her, and that his endeavour to throw off the yoke of her government was a very serious matter, and indeed involved him in a revolution. It need hardly be said that Boger was not the kind of man to shine in a revolution.

Mrs. Kettlewell was a middle-aged woman of commanding stature. She had been good-looking possibly early in life, but time had given a some-

what hard, almost a forbidding, expression to her face. Fortune, perhaps, had not been too kind to her; and in her continual struggles to wrest favours from that goddess, a certain scowl had settled upon her brow—the muscles of her mouth had acquired a rigid, determined look. The stiff, formal curls she wore round her face were now threaded with grey. There was the flush as of an angry sunset upon her complexion, which might be attributable either to natural infirmity of temper, or to the tightness with which she tied the cap-strings under her chin hindering her circulation. She was simply dressed, generally either in black silk or some dark material, which, fitting very closely the robust proportions of her figure, gave rather a stuffed-pincushion aspect to her bodice—the notion being aided by the fact that she invariably kept a useful store of pins stuck into this portion of her attire. She was understood to be a widow, and without offspring. Of the departed Mr. Kettlewell she was never heard to speak. He was believed to have followed a seafaring line of life; and certain dingy objects, in the nature

of curiosities from outlandish parts, to be found doing duty as ornaments in various corners of the house in Sackbut Place, gave support to this view. It was certain, however, that Mrs. Kettlewell had lived alone letting lodgings for very many years.

As Mr. Boger prepared to sally forth he found Mrs. Kettlewell in attendance with his hat most carefully brushed, his gloves neatly stretched, flattened, and deposited on its rim, and his umbrella folded into its slimmest form. He was ungrateful, he was even angry at this zealous solicitude on his behalf. "I could do all that for myself, if need were," he murmured. "I hate all this fuss. Why can't the woman give over all this tiresome meddling?" He did not allow these opinions audible expression, however,

"It's an east wind, Mr. Boger, for all it's shining so brightly. Now, *do* wear something round your neck; you'll really be glad of it later in the day."

"Thank you—no."

"But you must, Mr. Boger—indeed, you must."

I shouldn't forgive myself if you were to catch cold."

So, in spite of him, a shawl was wrapped round his neck. In the street, out of sight of Sackbut Place, he stamped with rage at Mrs. Kettlewell's officiousness—at his wretched weakness in submitting to it. But for a feeling of shame—an objection to wanton waste—he would have torn the shawl off, and flung it in the roadway, or down an area.

"What's the matter, Boger?" demanded Pettigrew presently in the morning-room of the Acropolis; "you look flustered."

"It's nothing—nothing."

"Been talking to Mrs. Kettlewell?"

"Well, curiously enough, I *have* been talking to Mrs. Kettlewell."

"And—you've told her?"

"No; not yet. But I mean to, Pettigrew."

"Well, you won't be advised. But I didn't think you *had* told her." Pettigrew smiled rather provokingly.

Boger understood that an imputation upon his

courage was implied. He did not deem it necessary to reply. He assured himself that he would stand a good deal from Pettigrew—could afford to endure his friend's most cynical treatment of him. There was silence for some minutes.

"Does she drink, do you think, Boger?" Pettigrew asked suddenly—"Mrs. Kettlewell, I mean. Uncommon red face, to be sure; never saw a woman with a redder."

"I have no reason to suppose that her habits are other than temperate," Boger answered with much gravity. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, it just occurred to me. I remember that when I used to look in upon you in the autumn—when you had that bad attack of yours, you know—I used sometimes to think that she was—well—shall I say—screwed?" Pettigrew spoke as one who deprecated the term he employed, the while he felt driven to employ it.

"Never saw her so."

"She has the run of your cellar, I suppose?"

"Well, I'm not one to lock up things much.

But I've never kept any great store of liquor at my lodgings; never had any occasion to do so. Merely a few bottles of wine and cognac."

"And you've found them go quickly?"

"Well, I have. Things *do* go quickly, you know, in lodgings. I never could ask about the last glass left in a decanter, or the bottom of a bottle of spirits—never could. I've always felt that those were the perquisites of the servants about one, if they cared to have them."

"Just so. And *she* had them, I don't doubt," said Pettigrew with a suggestive air. "She always seemed to me just the woman to take deuced good care of her perquisites, and to take a wide view as to what were perquisites."

Boger did not feel disposed to enter upon a defence of Mrs. Kettlewell.

"And who was that man, may I ask?" Pettigrew continued.

"What man?"

"The man who used to be so much about the place when you were ill."

"Never heard of any man being about the

place. You must be mistaken. I don't think there was any such man."

"Oh yes, there was; no mistake at all about it. It was no affair of mine, you know, and one doesn't like to mention these things. It looks like meddling—interfering where one's no business to interfere. But there *was* a man; most certainly there *was*."

"What sort of man?"

"Well, I never took much notice of him. But I know that, going home from the club, quite the last thing at night, I used, sometimes, to look in to have the latest account of you: for I was really anxious about you."

"Well?"

"Well, there was always—that is, nearly always—a man in your front room, smoking, drinking gin-and-water—going on so as to give one the idea that the whole place belonged to him."

"You don't say so, Pettigrew!"

"But I do. And—if I'm to say all I know—that man used to wear your clothes."

"My clothes! What do you mean, Pettigrew?"

"Well, I'll take my oath I met that man in Piccadilly, one evening, dressed in your surtout coat. You know the one I mean—the brown, with the fur collar and cuffs."

"But—it's not possible. You never mentioned this before."

"No; as I said, it was no business of mine, and I don't care to make mischief. Besides, you seemed so wedded to Mrs. Kettlewell —"

"Oh, but that's nonsense, Pettigrew."

"Well, it may be: still, as the subject's turned up, it's as well that you should receive such information as I have to give. There's no mistake—it's exactly as I've told you."

"But what am I to understand?"

"That I can't tell you. Only, there's something wrong—that seems beyond a doubt."

"But, surely, surely, Pettigrew, you should have given me earlier information."

"I couldn't tell you when you were so ill, could

I? It would have been utterly useless, to say nothing of gravely adding to your trials. It would have been cruel, simply."

"But when I recovered?"

"It seemed to me you had best discover the thing for yourself. How was I to know?—the man might be doing what he did with your concurrence. It was clear that Mrs. Kettlewell was cognisant of his doings. Clearly, I had no right to meddle in the matter; I keep out of things of that kind on principle. I hate to have people interfering with me, however good their intentions; and I don't interfere with other people."

Boger looked much bewildered.

"After all, I daresay it's a simple matter," said Pettigrew; "and that there's really nothing in it."

"But, it's very strange—very unaccountable. There *must* be something in it. I'd no notion of this kind of thing. I've had the greatest reliance upon Mrs. Kettlewell."

"Well, I think I told you my opinion before. I

believe her to be a dangerous woman. I hope you may not find that true."

"I hope not, indeed," acquiesced Mr. Boger, with unfeigned fervour. "I—I really don't know what to think about it. A man in my surtout coat, sitting smoking in my room while I am lying ill and helpless in bed; a strange man, drinking gin-and-water! Why, it's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of! And you can't describe him, Pettigrew?"

"Well, no; I'm not much of a hand at description, and I didn't look at him particularly. I might know him again, or I might not; I really can't say. He was a stoutish, biggish sort of man, about your size, Boger. I remember, now you've mentioned it, that he must have been very nearly your figure, for the surtout fitted him admirably."

"Confound him! You noticed nothing else, Pettigrew!"

"It didn't strike me to look at his other garments," Pettigrew replied simply.

"I don't mean that. But, in my rooms—at

Mrs. Kettlewell's? There were no other strange things going on?"

"Well, I must say there seemed generally a disposition to collar things—to take for granted that it was going to be all U P with you, you know—and to lay violent hands upon all your goods and chattels. I don't state that as a matter of certainty, but that was my suspicion."

"They thought it was going to be all U P with me," Boger echoed feebly, his face very white.

"Well, I fancy it was rather a nasty corner you went round, you know, Boger. Simmons almost said as much."

"I wish you'd told me this before, Pettigrew; I do wish you had."

"I make it a rule never to interfere between husband and wife; or between a bachelor and his housekeeper. I hardly know, now, how I came to say what I have said. But I did it for the best."

"You did quite right; and I'm much indebted

to you. I must really have this matter out with
Mrs. Kettlewell."

"If you take my advice you'll hold your tongue,
and give her a wide berth."

CHAPTER VII.

"HOW DARE YOU?"

BOGER was now hot, now cold; now cowardly, now courageous. He decided that he would, as he said, "have the whole matter out with Mrs. Kettlewell;" the thing should be thoroughly explored and explained from first to last; no stone should be left unturned in his efforts to solve the mystery of the proceedings in Sackbut Place during his illness; he was not a man, as they should find, to be hoodwinked, or trifled with, or defrauded—with much more to similar effect. Anon his tone lowered, a sort of internal trembling seized him, and he felt much disposed to follow the prudent counsels of Pettigrew—to say nothing, to keep quiet, and then suddenly to *bolt*—that was Pettigrew's word—from his lodgings and his

landlady. Safely married to his Julia, how small would seem the nefarious doings and the despotic government of Mrs. Kettlewell! They would be quite things of the past—things to laugh at. It was certainly a tempting course. But then it was by no means a brave one—hardly a manly one, indeed; and he had already declared peremptorily against the timid recommendations of his friend. So he came to a kind of compromise with himself. He would accept the teaching of the hackneyed line of Ovid as to the greater safety of the middle path. Bygones should be bygones; he would not inquire of Mrs. Kettlewell concerning her past doings, however reprehensible; sleeping dogs should lie. But he would adhere to his original determination—inform her of his intended marriage, and give her notice in the usual way of his intention to quit her house at an early date. Further, he now made up his mind that if he bestowed upon her any gift at his departure, it should be of a less costly nature than he had at one time contemplated.

"There shall be no mistake or question of any

kind in the matter," he said; and he wrote out on club letter-paper—availing himself of such legal phraseology as he had at command—a formal notice of his intention to determine his tenancy of Mrs. Kettlewell's apartments. He read and re-read this document, was pleased with the official, statutory sort of flavour it seemed to him he had imparted to it, and then made a fair copy of it. "I'll hand it to her this very night," he said; then added, "if I find her up when I get home." He did not hurry from his club, however; there was no necessity for hurry, he determined. "To-morrow will do just as well as to-night." Then, by way of fortifying himself for any emergency that might arise, he took an extra glass of brandy-and-water: the alcohol being by much the larger contributor to the compound.

He left the Acropolis at rather a later hour than was usual with him—not, of course, from any disinclination to go home, but at the last moment he discovered that he had missed, until then, perusing an evening paper which contained on that occasion much interesting matter. He let himself into the

house in Sackbut Place with his latch-key—quietly, for he did not wish to disturb any of his co-lodgers. All was very still. The household had no doubt retired for the night. He found his candlestick in its usual place on the hall-table. He lighted his candle, and with the noiselessness becoming to a gentleman ascending stairs late at night, he proceeded to his room on the first floor.

"I'll speak to her the first thing to-morrow morning," he said to himself—"the very first thing."

"Would you like the gas lighted?" asked a voice. Boger started. Mrs. Kettlewell was standing in the doorway.

"No—no, thank you, Mrs. Kettlewell."

"Oh, you won't have the gas lighted."

A certain strangeness in the tone and the method of her speech struck upon Boger's ear. She had not said *gas* simply, but rather *gash*. Her articulation was hazy and muffled. Boger perceived that Mrs. Kettlewell was, in truth, leaning against the door-post. It seemed probable that, but for that support, she must have fallen prone

upon the floor. Her eye was dim, her curls and cap disarranged, and her complexion very crimson. In plain truth, Mrs. Kettlewell was inebriated. "Pettigrew was quite right," thought Boger, as he surveyed her with reprobating eyes.

"I don't want anything, thank you, Mrs. Kettlewell."

"Oh, you don't want anything, thank you!"

"And I think you'd better go to bed."

"Better go to bed!" She repeated his words after him, in the manner of an incoherent and intoxicated echo. She advanced into the room, and abruptly tumbled into a chair. Boger was enraged and disgusted.

"Mrs. Kettlewell, I beg to give you notice—formal notice—that I don't stop here after next week." His demeanour was resolute, but his voice was tremulous. He spread out before her the document he had drawn up at the Acropolis.

"Going away?" she said, with a drivelling laugh.

"Certainly. Going away."

"Going to be married, perhaps?" Her speech

was here much rent by hiccups, and her eyes leered eccentrically.

"Well, yes; going to be married," Boger admitted with reluctance and astonishment.

"I know. Miss Lupus!" She pronounced the words—"Mish Lupush," and then gave way to a fit of most extravagant and fatuous mirth.

"How could she have learned all this?" Boger asked himself.

"And this is your notice to quit?" She waved the paper to and fro impetuously.

"Just so."

"That for your notice to quit!" She tore the document in half, and tossed it towards him.

"You'll be sorry for this, Mrs. Kettlewell," said Boger with a perplexed and pallid face. He had never expected, never made preparation for, this violent scene. "You really forget yourself, Mrs. Kettlewell; you quite forget yourself. But you're not sober. How dare you—I say, how dare you—conduct yourself in this manner? Leave the room, woman!" Then, as though somewhat

frightened at his own display of authority, he added, with abated spirit: "I beg that you will leave the room, Mrs. Kettlewell."

"I shan't, then. There, that's flat." With a sudden effort, she seemed to control her tipsiness, and regain command over her disordered senses. She stood erect, and folded her arms, a fierce scowl gathering upon her face. "You talk to me like this! How dare *you*? I'm a respectable woman. I pay my rent and taxes regular. You don't swindle *me* out of my rights."

"No one wants to swindle you, my good soul," Boger urged in a tone that was somewhat cowed. Probably he thought that in her present wild mood it was best, if only out of regard for the repose of the other occupants of the house, to address her in a mild and conciliatory fashion.

"*You want to swindle me, Boger; you know you do. But I'll have my rights!*"

"*You shall have your rights.*"

"*And you shall stay here. What do I care for your notice-to-quits, or for your Miss Lupuses!*"

"Don't mention that lady's name—or—you'll provoke me."

"Stuff! I've read her letters. I knew all that was going on. She's making a fool of you, Boger. She's no better than she should be, I warrant. Who's Miss Lupus, that she should come interfering here?"

"Another word, woman, and I put you out of the room. I'll—I'll send for a policeman." Mr. Boger was much agitated.

"Send for a policeman! What! you'll turn me out of my own house? I should like to see you do it."

Boger felt doubtful as to whether he *could* do it—as to how far the law, if he invoked its help, could really be of any service to him.

"Mrs. Kettlewell," he said after a pause, during which his breathing was short and troubled, "I must beg you to withdraw. The hour is most inconvenient for a discussion of any kind. You must be aware that your presence here, in this apartment, at this time of night, is—is most unseemly, to say the least of it."

"You don't deceive *me*; you don't get the better of *me*; you don't escape *me*. You give me a notice to quit, do you? Well, I give you a notice to stay!"

In her turn, she flung a document upon the table. She had lost command of herself again. She reeled as she spoke, and her voice thickened. Her facial muscles relaxed, and her expression became helplessly imbecile.

"What does this mean?"

"Read that," she cried in a guttural voice; "and then desert me if you dare, Boger! I'll set the parish on you!"

Bewildered and frightened, Boger took up the paper. It was blue in colour and oblong in form. He read it, and started back almost with a scream.

It was a marriage certificate, signed by the registrar of the district. It set forth that a marriage had been duly performed, in the presence of that functionary, between Bertie Boger, bachelor, and Susan Kettlewell, widow, both being of full age, and both resident in his district. The names of two witnesses were added, and a date in a month

of October then last past was assigned to the marriage.

Mrs. Kettlewell was silent; she had fallen into a heavy inebrious sleep. Mr. Boger seized his hat and stole from the house, still holding the certificate in his hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

BOGER'S FLIGHT.

BOGER did not stop to close the street-door after him.

For very many years he had not run so fast as he ran that night. Indeed, for very many years he had not run at all; his quickest pace upon the most urgent provocation had been but a mild kind of amble; now he more than trotted—he even galloped. Weighted as he was with years and redundant flesh, his speed of movement distressed him sorely. Still he kept on—bravely is not the right word—let us rather say with the energy of despair. He was trembling all over—panting, perspiring; agonising groans seemed to be jolted out of him as he sped along; his limbs threatened to give way beneath him; his heart

was whirled about as in a churn, now banged against his ribs, now tossed up to his throat. He had never felt his feet so tender, or the paving-stones so hard. He hardly knew what he did—whither he was bound; but a wild desire to leave Sackbut Place behind him—to have some space between himself and Mrs. Kettlewell—possessed him absolutely. It was not a moment for deliberate thought, or he might have reflected regretfully on his lack of training, his utterly bad form and condition for the violent exercise he was undergoing.

Perhaps mechanically—certainly with no very clear intention—his steps carried him towards the Acropolis. Gradually his reason cleared. He must have aid and advice; he could not act for himself in the strange trouble that had come upon him; he had long resigned action; it was not in his line; he was helpless, feeble, incapable as a child; he must have some one to lean upon—to counsel him, to act for him, or at least to tell him what had best be done. Pettigrew was his man—who else? Pettigrew's sagacity was proved: had

he not foreseen something of the frightful difficulty that had arisen ? Pettigrew was at the club when Boger quitted it; he would rejoin Pettigrew.

The figure of a stout gentleman fleeing down Piccadilly at midnight occasioned some stir. The policeman viewed him half with derision, half with suspicion. Ought he to follow ? Was there mischief afoot ? Was it for a wager, or a tipsy frolic, that this pedestrian John Gilpin thus raced on his way ? Or was he a father of a family, about to be increased, hastening for the doctor ? So the constable questioned himself, obtaining unsatisfactory responses, and then, constable-like, doing nothing. Belated street-boys and hilarious night-revellers raised shouts and cries of ridicule, outstretched their arms, and feigned attempts to stay the fugitive or obstruct his path. But, now on the pavement, now in the roadway—in dire peril from the wheels of Hansoms—Mr. Boger held on his way.

“ Mr. Pettigrew ! ” he gasped at the door of the Acropolis, and nearly reeled into the friendly arms of the hall-porter.

"Just gone, sir—not a minute ago. Nothing wrong, sir, I hope?"

"Gone!" cried Boger, with a moan of anguish, and then he turned from the Acropolis and fled anew. He knew where Pettigrew lodged—in a modest chamber over a bootmaker's shop in Jasmin Street, St. James's. Boger ran thither; fortune favoured him for once: he found Pettigrew on the door-step, just about to turn his key in the door, and withdraw for the night. Boger clutched feebly at his friend's arm.

"Be off! I've no halfpence, I tell you!" Then, in an altered tone, Pettigrew continued: "I beg your pardon. Good heavens! Boger! Is it you?"

"At last I've found you! Thank God!" Boger had breath for no further utterance. With a convulsive shiver and chattering teeth, he collapsed, and sank upon the door-step, crushing his hat in his fall, and narrowly escaping personal injury from the scraper.

"He's drunk," said Pettigrew. "Very odd; he was sober enough when he left the club an

hour ago ; never saw him like this before. Come, I say, old man—get up ; this won't do, you know ; you can't do this here." Pettigrew unconsciously had assumed quite the manner of a policeman confronting one intoxicated. He shook his visitor —then extending a helping, or rather perhaps an up-dragging hand to him, and at last had him nearly on his legs again — very insecure and decrepit legs they were. "Come, that's better." And he put Boger's hat straight for him, and brought back the bow of his cravat, which had veered round to the nape of his neck, to its proper anchorage under his chin.

"My dear Pettigrew," Boger moaned amid distressing pantings, "forgive me ; I'm very ill."

"I see you're not quite the thing."

"I've no right to disturb you at this hour, I know."

"Well, you haven't. But what's the matter ?"

"That woman——"

"What woman ?"

"Mrs. Kettlewell. Her conduct—perfectly awful—never heard of such a thing—if you only

knew—if I could only explain—but my breath—the excitement—the alarm——”

“You'd better come in, I think. It's cold on the door-step.” Pettigrew opened the door, and supported his friend into the passage, which smelt pungently of the boots in the adjoining shop, then propped him securely against the wall, while he lighted his candle. “Can you manage to get upstairs, do you think ?”

With the help of the balusters and his friend's shoulder, Boger laboriously mounted the staircase. Pettigrew conducted him into a cramped little apartment—also smelling strongly of boots, as indeed did every room in the house—and safely deposited him upon a hard and prickly sofa. “Lie there, old man, and get your wind,” said Pettigrew. “Never saw a fellow so blown in all my life.”

He was a lean, dry, sinewy man himself, and though old and wrinkled, his hair very gray and scanty, was yet capable of a good deal of muscular effort of a stiff kind. If his face was older, his figure was younger than Boger's. They were

perhaps really of about the same age, however Boger might flatter himself as to his youthful advantages over his friend.

Pettigrew peered at the recumbent figure of Boger curiously. "No; not drunk," he decided, "but terribly upset about something or another." He unlocked a chiffonier, and took out a small decanter. He mixed a tumbler of brandy-and-water. "Drink that," he said simply. Boger obeyed. In the state he was reduced to he would have complied with any direction; and certainly he stood in need of some stimulant.

"That woman!" he moaned again presently.

"Ah!" Pettigrew nodded his head, with the air of saying, "I told you so."

"Read that." Boger held out the marriage certificate—now very damp and crumpled.

Pettigrew smoothed it out on the table, drew a chair near, and sat down to examine deliberately the document submitted to him. He took out his eye-glasses, polished them with his silk handkerchief, and set them firmly astride upon his sharp bony nose. He regaled himself with a large pinch

of snuff, and then slowly and solemnly read through the paper; re-perused it, turned it over to see if anything was endorsed upon it. He laid it down carefully at last, smoothing it afresh, took off his glasses, and then for a few moments sat speechless, staring at Boger.

Early in life, it may be noted, Pettigrew had served under government as a stipendiary magistrate at the penal and military station of St. Mungo's, the largest of the Queen Anne Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Indeed, his present income for the most part consisted of the pension awarded him on his retirement from that responsible position. Occasionally something of his old judicial habit of mind and demeanour would assert itself. The present was clearly an opportunity for a demonstration of that kind. He mounted the bench again, so to speak, and prepared to adjudicate upon the matter Boger had brought under his notice. He was not quite clear yet whether Boger was a prosecutor or a prisoner under charge; but he was ready to consider the matter with becoming gravity and impartiality, and, so

far as he could, to pass sentence upon and commit anybody deserving of such punishment as it was within his jurisdiction to award.

"Well, that seems clear and straightforward enough. What have you to say to this—Boger?" He was nearly saying "prisoner," or "defendant."

"It's the most mysterious—the most awful—the most unaccountable——"

"Well, well, it may be so. Don't waste the time of the court—I mean, don't let us lose any time."

"It's some infernal trick on the part of that woman—some infamous conspiracy——"

"I've no evidence to that effect before me. Do you dispute the genuineness of this document?"

"I hardly know—I hardly like to think—what it means."

"It means marriage before the registrar—a civil marriage; that's plain enough. Do you mean to say that you *haven't* married the woman mentioned here"—he resumed his glasses for a

moment, and studied anew the certificate—"Susan—yes; Susan Kettlewell, widow, of full age? Now, be careful."

"My dear Pettigrew, what a question! How can you suppose — how can you for one moment—"

"Come, come; answer the question. Yes or no?"

"No; then. *No*; most distinctly."

"*And that you swear?*"

"*And that I swear,*" repeated Mr. Boger, involuntarily humouring his interlocutor's judicial manner.

Pettigrew paused, as though irresolute how to proceed, the while he eyed his friend with considerable suspicion. Boger's distress was acute.

"Why, look at the date of the confounded thing," he urged at last.

"Hush! Keep your temper." Pettigrew again resorted to his eye-glasses. "The marriage is certified to have been performed on the 4th October last."

"I was ill in bed—motionless—helpless at the time. You know I was, Pettigrew," pleaded Boger piteously.

"This, of course, is only an informal and preliminary investigation," said Pettigrew. He rose and went to his writing-desk, which stood on a table in the corner of the room. He was a man of precise and methodical habits, it seemed, and kept a diary. He turned back to some past entries, and then read out: "'4th October.—Called on Tomkinson at his club—early, by appointment, and breakfasted with him. Met old General Hickson, whom I've hardly seen since I left St. Mungo's; he looks the worse for wear. At noon, called at Boger's; found him ill in bed—with rheumatic gout in his hands, knees, and feet—terribly pulled down. Met Simmons there, and had some talk with him. S. thinks badly of B.'s case; good constitution, but much impaired by careless feeding—over-indulgence at the table. B.'s full habit of body counts against his recovery,' &c. I needn't read any more. Yes; we might make that evidence for what it's worth, and we might call Simmons.'" He looked round, as

though to instruct an usher of the court to bring Simmons before him; then checked himself. "No doubt something might be done in the way of proving an *alibi*. Still, this certificate is unquestionably, to say the least of it, strong *prima facie* evidence of a marriage. Then you are found domiciled in the same place—under the same roof. As to general repute, I won't take upon myself to say much; it's of little consequence, perhaps, in regard to an English marriage. It is clear, however, that your friends have not been without suspicion on the subject. They cannot but have perceived that this woman had obtained a peculiar influence and ascendancy over you. I venture to assert that such a marriage as this paper certifies to have taken place would not have surprised them. I may say that they were even, in some sort, prepared to hear of it any day. The woman is what many people would call a fine woman—still. She'd been your housekeeper for many years. Men arrived at your time of life have often been known to marry their housekeepers. Her demeanour towards you could hardly be described as

that of a servant—it was that of an equal—an intimate even—”

“Good heavens, Pettigrew, what are you driving at?” demanded Boger, with much anguish of expression.

Pettigrew, in an abstracted, summing-up sort of way, had been inflicting severe injuries upon his friend—probing him to the quick—pressing upon his wounds in the most painful manner. “Do you mean solemnly and sincerely to declare that you’re not married to Mrs. Kettlewell?” redemanded Pettigrew.

“Certainly not. Solemnly and sincerely—nothing of the kind; never dreamed of such a thing; wouldn’t marry her at any price; wouldn’t touch her with a pair of tongs,” Boger stuttered forth, inarticulate with anger and apprehension.

“Well, well, that’s all beside the question. The question is”—Pettigrew hesitated a moment, as though himself in doubt as to what the question really was—“the question is: what do you mean to do?”

“I don’t know,” Boger replied desperately. “I

want you to advise me—to help me. Something I must do. But what? For God's sake, tell me, Pettigrew."

"Well, I suppose the proper course will be to indict her for conspiracy."

"I'll do it!" cried Boger resolutely. "I'll sift the thing to the bottom; I'll expose her; I'll show up the whole scandalous trick; I'll appear against her at the Old Bailey; I'll be revenged upon her; I'll lock her up for this, if I have to spend hundreds of pounds to do it."

"Very well, then. The first thing to-morrow morning we must go down to Bokes and Bokes; you must put yourself in their hands: you've no great case at present, but they'll see that you have one before they've done with you."

Bokes and Bokes, it should be noted, were attorneys of Jewish origin, famed for their adroitness and experience in criminal practice.

"Bokes and Bokes, by all means," said Boger.

"That's settled, then; that's business, that is. We can do no more to-night." Pettigrew thereupon ceased to be Pettigrew the stipendiary magis-

trate of St. Mungo's, and became again Pettigrew of the Acropolis, Piccadilly—the friend of Bertie Boger.

"Have some more brandy-and-water," said Pettigrew. "You mustn't go back to Sackbut Place to-night."

"I could not, I dare not," Boger confessed tremulously; "the sight of that woman would really kill me. If you could have seen her, Pettigrew—if you could have heard her!"

"Glad I didn't."

"I wouldn't have believed it of her."

"I would," murmured Pettigrew. "You must put up to-night with a shake-down on that sofa. I'll do the best I can for you: to-morrow we'll make better arrangements. There's a room upstairs you can have for a few nights, I daresay. I can lend you a collar and things. Only keep away from Sackbut Place."

"I will," Boger said promptly. Pettigrew did not doubt that he would.

"I feel wretchedly weak and ill, Pettigrew. Do you know I really believe I ran all the way

to the Acropolis! Never ran so hard in all my life."

"Just so. Never mind; perhaps it will stave off a fit of the gout."

"I must write to-morrow to the Lupuses; they'll be expecting me on Sunday; I shall not be able to go; I shall not be nearly equal to it. I must beg them to excuse me. I'd better, hadn't I?"

"Well, yes. It's as well to be off with the old love before you're on with the new: get rid of one wife before you take another," Pettigrew advised with a grim smile.

Boger groaned.

CHAPTER IX.

BOKES AND BOKES.

IN good time on the following morning the two friends started in a cab for Messrs. Bokes and Bokes's office in Thavies Inn, Holborn.

"If it's a conspiracy, Boger," said Pettigrew, on their way thither, "depend upon it——"

"*If* it's a conspiracy? Why, of course, it's a conspiracy."

"I prefer to say *if*," observed Pettigrew, with a resumption of his magisterial air. "If it's *that*, depend upon it the man I saw in your rooms—in your coat—you remember?"

"I remember. Confound the fellow!"

"Depend upon it, *he*'s mixed up in the business."

"I shouldn't wonder," Boger agreed, with a vague look.

"They can't deceive me, you know, these people," chuckled Pettigrew. "I'm an old hand, you know, at this kind of thing; I don't forget my old experiences as a beak. The extraordinary cases that used to come before me at St. Mungo's! Wonderful—really wonderful!"

"No doubt; I've heard you say so before." Boger's face wore an alarmed expression. There seemed danger of certain of Pettigrew's well-known stories of his life in the Queen Anne Islands being forthwith reproduced. Pettigrew forbore, however. Possibly it occurred to him that the interior of a Hansom cab was ill adapted for purposes of prolonged and elaborate narrative.

"I could hardly sleep last night for thinking of your case, Boger."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," Boger said, rather absurdly: but his intention was good. "I'm quite ashamed of the trouble I've put you to."

"No trouble at all." Indeed, to tell the truth, Pettigrew found considerable enjoyment in the new occupation he had been so unexpectedly pro-

vided with, in the opportunity afforded him for airing his stock of legal lore and acumen, which had become, perhaps, a trifle mouldy and moth-eaten from long hoarding up and disuse. He felt that he had been almost unjust to the world and to himself in remaining idle so many years, in suffering his judicial faculties to continue so long unemployed. "And I did a stroke of business before you were up, Boger." Pettigrew was evidently pleased with and proud of himself.

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I had a doubt about that certificate. Was it genuine? I asked myself, or a mere hoax—a blank form filled in anyhow? So I went round to the registrar's: his office is only a step from my place."

"You're the best fellow in the world, Pettigrew. And you found——"

"No mistake at all about it, Boger. He showed me the entry in his books—all correct—there *was* such a marriage on the date given in the certificate. Bertie Boger, bachelor, and Susan Kettlewell, widow, both of full age, &c. To all

appearances, Boger, you're as fast married as you could possibly be."

"Bless my soul!—you don't say so!"

"But I do. I questioned the registrar, but, unluckily, he can't recollect anything about it: he marries so many couples, you see. But he's prepared to make oath as to the correctness of the entries in his books. He's always very particular, he says, that all legal forms and requirements are strictly complied with. It's only natural he should say that, you know; you couldn't well expect a public officer to say anything else."

"No, I suppose not," remarked Boger doubtfully.

"He don't profess to recollect the people he marries; never sees them again, as a rule, unless they come to him afterwards about births or deaths. He had a notion I came after a boy-and-girl marriage—a kind of runaway match, I fancy—which took place about the same time, and roused his suspicions, he admits. He felt sure there was something wrong about *that*—false statement as to age and place of abode—that kind of thing:

not that he could do anything, of course, if they'd complied with all the rules. It's his business to marry people, not to keep them apart. He has to think of his fees, of course. But I told him the marriage I was inquiring about was not between a boy and a girl—not that sort of thing at all." Pettigrew grinned rather cruelly as he said this.

"No, not between a boy and a girl," Boger acquiesced, with a feeling that his friend might have spared the remark, might have looked a little less amused. It was by no means a grinning matter.

"And I inquired about the witnesses."

"Ah, yes, the witnesses."

"Well, it almost seemed that they were strangers to the parties—were, in fact, another couple waiting to be married. He says it's often done. Couples don't always come provided with witnesses, and then they oblige each other in that way: a common thing, he assures me, with marriages at his office. One thing, perhaps; we may by these means be better enabled, if need be, to get hold of these witnesses, and see what they've

got to say about the thing. Their address is in his books, of course."

"Bless my soul!—seems an uncommon easy thing to get married."

"Yes; easier than to get unmarried, I fear. You've got married without knowing it, and all according to Act of Parliament. But here we are at Bokes and Bokes's." They entered the offices of that famous firm, and requested to see one of the partners.

"Is it criminal or bankruptcy?" asked a sharp-featured clerk. "You'd better speak to Mr. Aaron Bokes, I think. Here, Moss, take the names in to Mr. Aaron."

Moss, a young boy with an old face, its lineaments proclaiming his eastern origin, came up briskly. A peculiar grin contorted his features, and his black beads of eyes sparkled suddenly, as he surveyed the visitors.

"Name of Finnigan, I think?" he said to Mr. Boger, with a curious inward laugh.

"Finnigan? No. Take my card."

"Oh, not Finnigan." He went away mys-

teriously tickled, as it seemed, by some occult sense of humour.

"Finnigan! What's the boy mean?" Boger had barely time to ask, when, with Pettigrew, he was conducted into an inner room, and found himself in the presence of a small-sized middle-aged gentleman, nearly hidden by the masses of papers upon the desk in front of him. He looked over-worked, and his manner was acrid and irascible.

"Mr. Aaron Bokes?" He bowed, and sharply motioned them to take chairs and state their errand.

Boger began, after a pause, during which he drew a long breath and cleared his voice, talking lamely and cumbrously enough about conspiracy, fraud, indictment, &c.—a very incoherent recital. Mr. Bokes rang his bell impetuously. The boy Moss reappeared.

"It isn't for me," said Mr. Aaron Bokes with peculiar vehemence; "I said it wasn't. I knew it wasn't bankruptcy; it's criminal. Take the gents to Mr. Isaac. Here, take the card with you."

Boger and Pettigrew were straightway con-

ducted into the presence of another member of the firm. He was younger and more cheerful-looking, was very smartly dressed, was ringleted as to his hair, and wore rings on his fingers. His manner was bright and alert, and his whole aspect conveyed the idea that his branch of the practice of the firm—the criminal—was more congenial and soothing to the feelings than his brother's special pursuit in connection with the bankruptcy laws.

"Well, what is it? Let's hear," he said.

"Allow me," said Pettigrew, much vexed at Boger's confused and unofficial manner of stating his case; and he set forth with a practised air the main heads of the story of Mrs. Kettlewell's misdeeds. Mr. Isaac Bokes nodded—put a few pertinent questions—obtained tolerably succinct replies—jotted down a note or two on a clean sheet of paper.

"And that's all?" he said at length. "Well, there's suspicion, of course—not much else that I see—suspicion of fraud by means of personation. It's no great case to begin with, though we can make it take shape in time, no doubt; but I don't

see much for the jury at present. There may be a swindle in it—very likely there is—I don't say there isn't, mind you; on the other hand, it may mean just nothing at all. She claimed to be the gent's wife, you say—we have that on his evidence, but we've no other witnesses; and he admits that she was drunk at the time. You see it don't amount to much. You might wait to see what she says when she's sober; it don't do to pluck the apple before it's ripe—that's not a bit of use. We've a good defence, of course, if the gent were to get married again, and she were to try to prosecute him for bigamy—a first-rate defence, I should say, at the first blush of it. But for conspiracy to extort—that's what we should call it—we're weak, decidedly weak. I don't see that we can do anything just at present; we'd better wait a bit—that's my candid advice."

"But you see, Mr. Bokes," said Pettigrew, "my friend here was thinking of getting married very shortly—*really* married—and you can understand——"

"By all means let him get married—the best

thing he could do; that will simplify matters wonderfully. Let him get married, and then we can try him for bigamy!"

Boger shivered. He already saw himself tried, found guilty, and sentenced to a long term of penal servitude. The eloquent reproaches of the judge were already sounding in his ear; and then—Julia Lupus! The burden laid upon him seemed more than he could bear.

"Say we proceed against the woman," continued Mr. Bokes; "what does she do? The marriage can be proved beyond a doubt. Well, she produces the man she married—not you, another party, name of Bertie Boger—that's it, isn't it?—Yes, not a common name, no doubt; still, there may be more than one Bertie Boger in the world. Anyhow, she produces him—I should, I know, if I defended her—that's the fairest way of testing a prosecution—consider what you'd do if you were defending: she produces him, and there's an end of the case: she leaves the court with her friends 'without a stain on her character,' and all the rest of it, and has

a good right of action against you for false imprisonment and defamation of character. You know, gents, that won't do at all; I couldn't let you go into court on such terms—for my own sake, I couldn't."

The visitors looked gravely disconcerted: Boger was reduced to a state of helpless imbecility; Pettigrew began to feel that he had over-valued his St. Mungo experiences. They seemed dwarfed by the side of Mr. Isaac Bokes's intimate acquaintance with Old Bailey practice.

"I tell you what we can do, however. We've a beginning—and no doubt there's something to be done with the case. It will grow if we're careful of it. Leave her alone, and she'll commit herself so that we can lay hold of her: they always do, you know, criminals, especially when females. She means mischief, no doubt. I see her game—only chance has balked it. The gent was to die, and she was to come out as his widow, and seize everything. That was the plan, and by no means a bad one; and very fairly carried out, so far as it goes. Well, the gent gets well, and

so there's an end of the scheme for that journey. I don't suppose she meant poison—putting him out of the way."

"Good heavens!" murmured Boger.

"I shouldn't think she was up to that," continued Mr. Bokes, conveying the idea that he thought but poorly of Mrs. Kettlewell for her forbearance in the matter. "No; it was a smaller plant. But she couldn't hold her tongue, and bide her time. She gets drunk, blunders, and shows her hand. I daresay we shall be able to drop on to her. Leave the thing in my hands; I've got all the particulars necessary; I'll keep an eye on her. I'll have her well looked after. And *the man!* we'll find him. Then we shall be able to see our way a little better, and know where we are. That's all, gents, at present. Yes; I'll write or send when I've anything to communicate. Only, don't be in a hurry. These things take time. Good morning.—Door, Moss!"

And they quitted the office of Messrs. Bokes and Bokes, ushered out by the boy Moss, still glancing and grinning curiously at Mr. Boger.

"Sharp fellow that Bokes," observed Pettigrew.

"Sharp! My dear Pettigrew, it's really wonderful; I never saw anything like it."

"Ah, you see, Boger, you don't know much about the Old Bailey yet." There was bitter significance in Pettigrew's tone. "They do a wonderful deal of business. I suppose they're obliged to treat one in that curt sort of way. And he's right, no doubt. If you remember, Boger, I put it to you that you hadn't much of a case." Pettigrew felt it necessary to urge this in defence of his magisterial reputation. "And the law's wonderfully uncertain. Do what we may, the woman's a very good chance of escape."

"But, surely, surely, Pettigrew, they'd never bring it in that the marriage was valid—that I'm that woman's husband? They couldn't, you know, they really couldn't."

"I don't know that," Pettigrew said with some spitefulness. "It's clear she married somebody. Who was it, if it wasn't you? After all, you know, Boger, you wanted to get married—and

here's a wife ready to your hand—married to you already, according to law, without your being troubled at all in the matter. She's relieved you of all the conventional nuisance of the thing. Hadn't you better accept your fate? She's suited to you in some respects—age, for instance—and I don't doubt she'll make a tolerably good wife as wives go; though that isn't saying much for her, perhaps."

The anguish inflicted upon Boger by this cynical speech was extreme. He simply took to his bed—in an upper room in the house in Jasmin Street, and declined to get up on any account whatever.

CHAPTER X.

"**PISSIGAS.**"

PETTIGREW had lost his temper rather; he had been put out of conceit with himself; he had been completely distanced by Mr. Bokes of Thavies Inn. By the side of that famous Old Bailey lawyer, he felt that his own magisterial pretensions, founded on his St. Mungo experiences, were of little practical worth. There had indeed been a sort of contempt of his court.

He had not committed himself by his speech—so far, he could congratulate himself. His attitude had been becomingly judicial. He had even done something in the way of "throwing cold water," as he expressed it, upon Boger and his case. Yet mentally he had determined upon righting Boger, upon seeing him through his difficulties, helping

him out of them, exposing the conspiracy, and punishing the guilty. Discreetly or not—it was useless now to inquire—he had availed himself of the opportunity for action, for exerting his long dormant faculties in regard to advising and judging and benefiting his fellows, afforded by Boger's troubles. He could not draw back now; he was by nature too stanch and persistent. He felt constrained to go on with the business, not merely out of friendship for Boger, whom in truth he rather despised, and believed to have deservedly reaped as he had sown, but rather because he could not endure that an enterprise in which he had once embarked and concerned himself should result unprosperously. His doggedness had a selfish origin, no doubt, yet there was a creditable manliness about it. And it may be that he underrated his regard for Boger. Despising him he yet liked him. He was accustomed to Boger; he had known him for very many years; he should miss him sadly, "if anything were to happen to Boger," as he phrased it; they had grown old together. With all his foibles and frailties, Boger had many estimable qualities. He was

eminently companionable, and—the junior members of the Acropolis notwithstanding—"clubbable." An inferior creature, as compared with Pettigrew himself, doubtless; yet have not, time out of mind, inferior creatures been fondly cherished by very superior beings? Pettigrew felt that he must stand by Boger "on his own merits." Within every bosom, it would seem, there is a kind of deposit of sentiment, more or less; it may not be supplied in every case with a Jack-in-Box spring, enabling it to dart into notice on the lightest touch; it may, indeed, rise to the surface after long delay, with the slowness and sluggishness of a drowned body; still it's *there*, as a general rule, and will demonstrate itself upon occasion. In the instance under mention, the occasion had certainly arisen. Situated as he was, now or never was the time for Boger's friends to exercise their friendly sentiments on his account. Pettigrew decided that he would assuredly do what he could for Boger.

Pettigrew mused long and painfully over the case. He much wished to serve Boger—to justify

himself. Bokes had been shrewd, no doubt, particularly shrewd, Pettigrew conceded, but could not he, Pettigrew, be shrewd too? If he could only throw some new light upon the thing—could make some discovery by means of which Boger would be righted, justice vindicated, and the evil-doers punished! If he could only do this without help from Bokes and Bokes! What a triumph for the ex-magistrate of St. Mungo's. It was delightful in fancy; unfortunately, it seemed not warranted by fact. Again and again he went through the matter, rehearsed all he had said and done—all Boger had said and done—all that had happened at Bokes and Bokes's office. Morning, noon, and night, at home and abroad, up and in bed, it may almost be said that asleep or awake he was thus occupied; for Boger affected his very dreams, weighed upon his hours of repose like a very nightmare. But nothing seemed to result from all his unceasing toil. Still he toiled on, though he admitted to himself that his task seemed to grow more and more hopeless, that he was now merely guessing hap-hazard, groping in the dark, and striking out,

as it were, quite at random, very wildly indeed. Still he would not throw away a chance ; he would try again and again.

“A conspiracy, of course,” he was for ever saying to himself, as though impressing upon his mind certain fixed principles that of necessity governed the case. “Mrs. Kettlewell in it, helped by others ; perhaps by one other only. She would not be likely to let more than she could help into the secret. One would be enough ; and that one without a doubt the man I saw in Boger’s room —and afterwards in Piccadilly wearing Boger’s coat. I wish I’d looked at him more particularly, that I’d a more distinct notion of his features. If I’d only known the importance of observing him closely ! but of course I could not know that *then*. Still I think I should recognise him, if I could but set eyes on him again.”

He could not, however. He devoted days to prowling about the streets, glaring into the faces of the passers-by, with the wild hope of detecting Mrs. Kettlewell’s assistant in the fraud ; now and then he would even give chase to some harmless

stranger, and dog his footsteps for hours together, from some fancied resemblance borne by him to the man suspected of personating Boger before the registrar of marriages. It was in vain. Still he persisted; the while doubts began to prevail among his acquaintances in regard to his sanity, and the police conceived injurious opinions as to his character. He had been seen to hang on to the skirts of respectably-dressed people with quite a pickpocket's acquisitive expression of face.

And he did more practical and sensible service. He hunted up the witnesses of the marriage, and submitted them to severe interrogation. The evidence they could give was not very conclusive. They had but done what they were requested to do. They had witnessed the marriage and signed their names in the book. But they were absolute strangers to "the parties," and their recollection was vague in regard to the personal aspect of the couple. Still he elicited that the bridegroom was not a young man—nor a thin—nor a pale; and that he wore no hair upon his face—that he wasn't bald nor grey. Did his hair curl? Well, it might;

couldn't say for certain ; rather thought, to the best of belief, that it did ; but wouldn't undertake to swear to the fact—certainly not. That was about the effect of the evidence obtainable from the witnesses.

Was Boger deceiving him ? Had Boger really married Mrs. Kettlewell, all his protestations to the contrary notwithstanding ? Pettigrew even put these questions to himself. But he readily found answers. Was not the fact of Boger's incapacity from illness at the time sufficiently proved by his, Pettigrew's, own diary ! In addition, he obtained confirmatory evidence on that head from Simmons, Boger's medical attendant. Simmons was prepared to make oath that Boger could not possibly have stirred from his bed on the day assigned to the marriage in the certificate.

Moreover, he tested the signature in the registrar's book. It was not very much unlike Boger's ; that was the utmost that could be said for it. That it was not, in truth, Boger's, Pettigrew felt convinced. Nor was he shaken in this

opinion by the registrar's statement that "parties" were apt to be much "flustered" at his office, and that their signatures immediately after marriage could seldom be sworn to safely as in their usual handwriting, the occasion being so unusual. Pettigrew was satisfied, however, that, all this being allowed for, still the signature was not his friend's. There were peculiarities about Boger's *Bs* that would have asserted themselves under any circumstances.

He continued his efforts. "That Jew-boy, now —Moss, his name was, I think. What a very odd boy he was. Why do Bokes and Bokes employ such a boy? And why, why did he address Boger as 'Finnigan?' He did it more than once. He *would* call him 'Finnigan.' Can there be anything in *that*? Does *that* furnish one with any sort of clue?"

It was in the street moving slowly along, with downcast gaze, he thus mused, feeling that he was the while musing idly and uselessly. Suddenly he found himself stopped by a hoarding, in front of a new building. He raised his eyes. Was he

mad? Were his senses quitting him? Had he got Boger on the brain, so to say, softening and damaging that organ irreparably? Had he so possessed himself with this topic, that it affected everything he said and did, as insects take the colour of the food they subsist upon? In large letters before him stood the word "Finnigan!"

There was no mistake. He waited to collect himself—to master his emotions. Then he read a huge placard. It announced the attractions of the Unicorn Music Hall, situate somewhere in the east of London, and besought visitors to be in time, to come early, and witness the efforts of the Great Finnigan, Finnigan the Frolicsome, Finnigan the Frisky, Finnigan the Facetious, Finnigan the Funny, &c. The many titles of this "Eminent Comique," as he was called, were elaborately set forth.

"Is it mere accident? Can there be anything in it?" Pettigrew asked himself excitedly.

He was a man of action, constitutionally, though chance had forced upon him in his age a life of

pensioned indolence. He held his peace, but he made up his mind.

At nightfall, he was conveyed in a cab to Whitechapel. He had travelled a good deal in his time; yet, strange to say, or perhaps not strange, all things considered, he had never before visited Whitechapel. He alighted at the door of the Unicorn Music Hall, and secured a stall very near to the stage. He was nearly stifled by the clouds of bad tobacco-smoke that encompassed him; he was nearly poisoned by the sherry he had ordered, with old-fashioned logic, "for the good of the house," and tried to drink. But what will not friendship and perseverance endure? He waited through an overture, through a glee, through a hornpipe, through a comic song, through a sentimental ballad, through a tight-rope performance. "Will the evening never end!" he groaned. "At what time does Mr. Finnigan appear?" he demanded at last of a waiter.

"His 'round' here ain't till ten, sir. Edger Road at seven, Hobin at eight, Islington at nine,

here at ten, and Lambeth at eleven. A great 'it' he is, sir, and no mistake. Took wonderful with us from the first. You oughtn't to go without 'earing him, sir."

"I intend to hear him," said Mr. Pettigrew.

The hour came at last—and the man. A rustle of excited expectation, and "the great Finnigan's" "round" at the Unicorn had commenced.

"Boger, by Heaven!" cried Pettigrew. "And the man I saw in Boger's rooms, I'd take my oath! And he's got on Boger's surtout at this very moment!"

Finnigan began singing one of the most popular songs in his repertory. It was called: "I'm a Nobby Old Swell," or something to that effect. A chorus followed each verse—and there were many verses—the audience assisting uproariously. Pettigrew glanced round him. His eyes rested upon a small figure in the gallery immediately above him. He recognised at once the Jew-boy, Moss, from the office of Messrs. Bokes and Bokes. Moss, after the fatigues of his official duties, was spending his evening in a manner agreeable to himself, at

the Unicorn Music Hall, witnessing, enjoying, and applauding the efforts of the Great Finnigan. No doubt he was a constant supporter and admirer of that performer. Pettigrew's triumph was complete. There could be no mistake. He could now understand why Moss had addressed Bertie Boger as "Finnigan." The thing was perfectly intelligible : he had found the clue he had so long looked for ; he had vindicated himself as an ex-magistrate of St. Mungo's.

Finnigan's resemblance to Boger—part due to nature, part to art—was certainly remarkable. He had "dressed at" Boger; indeed, as Pettigrew detected, he had assumed Boger's very clothes, and he had "made up" as Boger. He had reddened his fleshy, small-featured face, painting lines and wrinkles here and there, for he was, in truth, many years younger than his original ; and he had imitated the luxuriant curls of Boger by means of a wig—for in this respect nature had been less kind to him than to Boger. Though liberal of her gifts, she perhaps cannot afford to be lavish, especially in regard to so precious a matter as a

head of hair. Boger's curls were indeed for Boger, and for few beside. Still the portrait of Boger presented by Finnigan was something more than recognisable. It was a cheap and spurious edition of Boger, adapted for an uncritical, uncultivated public; seasoned with caricature, and heightened by unnatural colouring. But still, that Boger was the fount and origin of Finnigan's delineation was not to be gainsaid. Boger had unconsciously sat for "the nobby old swell" of Finnigan's comic song. If it is complimentary to a man to account him peculiarly the type of his class, then that compliment had certainly been paid to Boger. "A kind of George-the-Fourth man"—so people described the presentment—and something was to be said for the description, Boger's arguments as to his youthfulness notwithstanding. But that some liberty had been taken with Boger, considered as a private individual, in this public, extravagant exhibition of his physical peculiarities, it would be vain to deny.

CHAPTER XI.

CONFESSON.

PETTIGREW quitted the Unicorn Music Hall without waiting to hear the other ditties and performances comprised in Finnigan's "round," returned home, and forthwith addressed a note to Messrs. Bokes and Bokes of Thavies Inn. For some time he had not slept so well as he slept that night. He was content: his exertions were rewarded. It was clear that he had discovered the man who had personated Boger before the registrar of births, deaths, and marriages—who, in the name of Boger, had married Mrs. Kettlewell. The conspiracy was laid bare; the law might at once pounce upon the conspirators. Boger's case, if not complete, was, without doubt, very much strengthened, and all owing to him, Pettigrew.

Alone he had done this thing ! He found peculiar comfort in that reflection ; and he slept the sleep of the happy.

If Pettigrew had thus shown himself equal to the occasion, it must be avowed that Boger had been found gravely unequal to it. True, he had not had the advantage of Pettigrew's judicial training at St. Mungo's ; but really, with some little effort, he might, one would think, have exhibited himself in a less unworthy, in a less ignoble light. But he had become quite incapable of effort of any kind, at no time, indeed, having been qualified for much distinction in that direction. He had simply gone to bed, and stayed there. He was panic-stricken, utterly demoralised, in the sense in which a defeated and shattered army is said to be demoralised. He lay abed groaning—desperately frightened. He altogether declined to stir himself. It was as though the town were in a state of siege, shells were exploding in the streets, and his bed-chamber was bomb-proof. He refused to rise until he could be satisfied that all peril was past, while

he illogically closed his mind to any chance of conviction on this head. He contented himself with the statement that he was too ill to get up. He was not well, certainly; but his illness was simply terror. Still, for the time being, he found that complaint quite as much as his constitution could support. Boger was not seen to advantage at this crisis in his affairs. Where would he have been but for Pettigrew? The abject thrall of Mrs. Kettlewell, it can hardly be questioned.

Of course he had not been able to present himself at the Maida Vale villa. The opaque form of Mrs. Kettlewell seemed ever to part him from his Julia; to stand between the lovers, solidly obstructing and menacing both. In vain he stretched forth his hand: the cool soft fingers of Miss Lupus no longer deposited themselves tenderly upon his palm. He wrote to her, hurried incoherent notes: he was ill; he was forbidden to stir out; he was particularly, most pressingly engaged. He hardly knew what he wrote. He excused himself as best he could for his prolonged absence from the home of his

affianced. In the misery of his confinement, self-enforced as it was, he even longed for the society of her father, George Lupus. He would willingly have been afflicted for hours together with the tedious conversation of that practitioner; would have listened again and again to the protracted narrative of his wrongs; to his objections to the negro race; and to his resuscitation of the events of the past. He would have consented to drink Jamaica rum by the tumblerful, and borne all the dyspeptic results of such a proceeding, if Lupus would but have visited him, and relieved the misery of his solitude. But Lupus came not. Pettigrew looked in upon him but seldom, and then was cynical, and censorious, and depressing in his talk. For the most part, Boger was left alone, in an upper chamber, very limited as to its accommodation, and much affected by that odour of the new boots in the shop, which pervaded so remarkably the whole of the house in Jasmin Street.

A cab stopped before the bootmaker's door. Mr. Isaac Bokes demanded to see Mr. Pettigrew.

"I got your note," said Bokes. "You're right enough about that matter; does you credit, I'm bound to say." Pettigrew looked pleased. "We'd already spotted the man, however." This Pettigrew did not in the least believe. "And now the question is, what do you intend to do? It's hardly for me to advise, you know: it doesn't do for a lawyer to interfere in these cases, unless prosecution is intended. Of course I oughtn't to be a party to anything like a compromise; it's for you and your friend to decide. Hadn't we better have him here?"

Boger was sent for. He declined to present himself. Pettigrew had to be very peremptory with him before he could be induced to face Mr. Bokes. He appeared at last, however, wan, unshaven, dishevelled, looking very old, clad in a faded dressing gown belonging to Pettigrew. The garment was tightly stretched—met with difficulty—Boger's proportions so much exceeded his lean friend's. His manner was very feeble, nervous, and irresolute.

"I know whom I'm dealing with," Mr. Bokes

continued: "the case is quite clear to me. West-end swells; private and delicate matter; first-rate thing for the newspapers—that's about it. Now, will you have an exposure? Do you want to have the whole business ripped up? It's for you to say. You know there'll be the deuce of an uproar and scandal: you'll never hear the last of it. I'm going against my own interest; I'm speaking unprofessionally, but as a man of the world, a friend, if I may say so, when I suggest hushing it up, stifling it quietly. The fact is, you'll get no good out of it if you go on; you'll only be finding amusement for other people, and the expense won't be a trifle. I've got the man downstairs."

"What! Finnigan?" asked Pettigrew.

"Yes; he's in the cab; Moss is on the box in charge of him. There's no real harm in the fellow; he's very penitent and humble; quite disposed to make a clean breast of it, and all the amends in his power. We'd better have him up, perhaps."

Bokes opened the window and whistled, by

way of signal, to Moss. Presently, Finnigan entered the apartment. His expression was contrite, his bearing deferential. His resemblance to Boger had undergone abatement. He was a younger and a thinner man; and when he removed his hat, he revealed the fact that his hair was cut as close as could be to his head, for the convenience of the wig-wearing necessities of his profession, probably. But his aspect thus acquired a decidedly convict-prison character.

"Well, Finnigan," said Mr. Bokes, "there's no disposition to deal hardly with you. But we shall be glad to hear anything you've got to say for yourself."

"Thank you all, gentlemen," said Finnigan humbly; the confidence and dash of manner he was wont to display at the Unicorn Music Hall had quite deserted him. "I haven't much to say. I'm in the worst mess I ever was in; I know that very well; and I've been in a good many messes in my time. But I didn't mean any harm, at least not much; not nearly so much as you might be disposed to think. You see *she* got hold of

me." It was evident that "she" referred to Mrs. Kettlewell. They all understood that; and Boger whined. "She was a relation of mine—through her husband, who's dead; so I've always heard. I need not tell you, sir"—Finnigan here addressed himself particularly to Boger—"that she's a woman with a way of her own, and a will of her own." Boger's looks expressed imbecile acquiescence in this opinion. "And that, after a sort, she's rather a fine woman than not." Boger signified dissent from this view of Mrs. Kettlewell. "Well, that's as people may think, you know," proceeded Mr. Finnigan; "and there's a many as thinks her a fine woman. She holds to it herself, and she's a knack of bringing you round to agree with her. *That*, you'll allow, perhaps." Boger was dumb, motionless, with down-turned eyes. "Anyhow, she brought *me* round, and came over me generally, as I may say. She gave out that the old gent on her first floor, meaning you, sir"—he nodded to Boger—"and no offence meant, was that bad he couldn't recover; that he hadn't chick nor child belonging to him; and that anything he left

behind him might as well be hers as anyone else's. She'd waited on him, and nursed him, and done for him generally, for so long, that she'd a better claim to his property than any other living creature. That was how she put it. Uncommon hot she was on that property to be sure: I never saw anything like it. She made quite sure it was hers, just to do whatever she liked best with. She couldn't get him to sign a will, she said; he'd got the gout in his hand, so that he couldn't sign his name: so she went in for the pious fraud of the marriage before the registrar."

"Don't call it a pious fraud," suggested Mr. Bokes; "no jury would swallow that, you know."

"Well, say the fraud simply," said Finnigan; "I'm agreeable."

"Yes, that's better: the fraud simply."

"I was that hard up at the time, gents, if you'll believe me, I'd have done any mortal thing almost for money. I lost my voice in the summer, and I'd been months out of an engagement. I'm in the comic vocalist line, as you know, I daresay, and I hadn't earned sixpence

at the business since I don't know when. She promised to make it worth my while—and I owed her money as it was—if I'd go in for the swindle. It was wrong, of course—I see that now; but it seemed pretty safe then—for the old gent"—he nodded to Boger again—"was uncommon bad, to be sure—his recovery seemed quite out of the reckoning. So, part for the money, and part for the fun of the thing, for there *was* fun in it—I'm only a music-hall singer, I know, but I've a sort of artist feeling, as I may say, for 'making up' my face, for my wigs, and clothes, and the 'character business' generally—for those reasons I joined in the conspiracy—that's what I must call it, I suppose."

"Quite so," commented Mr. Bokes.

"I 'went on,' as I may say, for the old gent yonder, before the registrar. Bless you, the trick was done, and she'd got her certificate of marriage and all, in less than five minutes! It seemed to me I'd made quite a hit in the part, you know, the thing went off so smoothly and easily. I was quite pleased with my make-up. I had a song

written on purpose, and I've introduced it in my rounds. It takes wonderfully at the music halls ; indeed, it's been the making of me, I may say. I shall work it through London, and right through the provinces in the autumn. That's all I've got to say, gents, I think, except that I'm uncommon sorry ; and I hope you'll deal as gently with me as you can find it in your hearts to do. I quite throw myself on your mercy. I know that's all I can do now. I plead guilty to the charge. I told Mr. Bokes, straight off, that I'd no defence ; that I'd make a clean breast of it ; that I'd put my hand to any writing in the way of a confession, or anything of that kind, he might choose to draw up. I don't want to go to prison—no man does—I own that, particularly just as I'm making way with the town, and got my name on the walls ; but all a man can do to square matters, I'll certainly do. I say that fairly, and I won't flinch from it—only, please don't be down harder upon me than you can help, gents. I've played a blackguard trick by you, I own ; but you're swells—the real sort, I can see that at a glance—and if you *can* let me off

with a laugh, or maybe 'a kick, why, don't balk yourselves, that's all. I won't ask for anything better, and I'll never forget your kindness as long as I live. I don't say anything about glasses round, or free tickets for all my performances, wherever I may be, because you ain't the sort to care about things of that kind, I daresay, or you'd be heartily welcome to them, I'm sure—only, don't be hard upon me."

Pettigrew took upon himself to nod to Mr. Bokes, for Boger was quite helpless—quite unable to act decisively in the matter.

"Just so," whispered Bokes. "The best way, of course—the only way, in fact; for, you know, we could never put your friend into the box. Only look at him—a worse witness for the prosecution I never set eyes on. He'd ruin any case, and we should get laughed out of court in less than no time.—Here you, Finnigan: you must come round to my office—we'll have a formal confession and apology drawn up for your signature."

"Anything you please, sir."

"And if you behave properly, I daresay you

won't hear anything more of the case. As for your wife——”

“*My wife?*”

“Yes; she *is* your wife, you know.”

“The deuce she *is*!”

“*You* married her, at any rate; there's no mistake about that.”

“That's the worst thing I've heard yet,” said Finnigan despondingly. “*I* never meant to marry her.”

“This will teach you to go trifling with the marriage laws, my fine fellow. You've unconsciously saddled yourself with a wife—a nice one, too, according to all accounts. Are you sure her first husband's dead? If he isn't, there's a chance for you.”

“But he *is*, I should say. He must be by this time,” said Finnigan moodily. “Why, he was a man that deserved hanging ten times over.”

“Then, very likely he's still alive,” Mr. Bokes observed drily.

Finnigan did not seem to value this possibility very highly. “He was such a beggar to drink, you see.”

"Well, if he's dead, that woman's your wife beyond all question. You didn't mean to do it, no doubt, but you've done it all the same, fast enough. I congratulate you."

"I don't think she knows it, that's one thing," Finnigan said, cheering up.

"Never fear; she'll find it out all in good time. Trust a wife for finding out her husband. She'll be down upon you one of these fine days, and then—I don't envy you, that's all I've got to say. But perhaps you can make her useful in the comic duet line."

Finnigan shook his head. He evidently mistrusted Mrs. Kettlewell's talent for comic duet singing. "She's off, sir, that's one comfort. She took the alarm some days back. Canada—that's her game, I think. She collared all she could, shut up the house, and bolted. I only hope she'll settle in Canada," Finnigan added fervently.

"I know all about her, my fine fellow," Bokes said with a confident air. "I've only to telegraph, and I can lay my hand upon her at any moment. I knew she was off."

Pettigrew was never to be shaken in his conviction that Bokes was taken by surprise in this matter :—that he did *not* know of Mrs. Kettlewell's departure.

"There's one thing more I should like to mention," said Finnigan presently.

"What's that?"

"Well, you see, it was part of the make-up, and has helped me wonderful in the business. *She* gave 'em to me, but I don't feel that they're rightly mine, considering all. I've a surtout coat and other things the property of the old gent yonder——"

"Keep them," said Boger, speaking for the first and only time in the discussion. "And get out!"

With that the conference closed.

CHAPTER XII.

“SOUR GRAPES.”

THERE came a postman's knock—a letter for Mr. Boger. He glanced at the address, written in what we may call a bold feminine hand—large, clear, with, to employ a nautical term, a rakish rig about the letters. Boger tore open the envelope, hurriedly saddled his nose with his double-glasses, and read:

“DEAR MR. BOGER,—I hope you will forgive any little deception you may think I have been guilty of. But I did it for the best, and you really must not be cross with me. I am sure you will, upon reflection, agree with me that we are not suited to each other, and that you may without difficulty find some one better qualified in every way than I can pretend to be to promote your happiness. I

feel that I cannot be your wife; it would be unjust to you, to myself, and to others. Papa seemed to wish it, and I quite appreciated the compliment of your offer. At the moment, I found myself unable to do otherwise than accept it. Pray, believe, dear Mr. Boger, that I shall always be grateful for your exceeding kindness in the matter. But the fact is, that I have been long sincerely attached—indeed, I must own, secretly engaged to my cousin, George Luples, of whom you must have heard me speak. He is a lieutenant in the 15th Regiment of West India Fusiliers. Papa would never hear of George's proposals, for at that time he had nothing in the world but his pay, and no doubt my marriage with him would have been then the height of imprudence. He has of late, however, become possessed of a considerable fortune, bequeathed to him by a rich aunt. He is at home on leave, to look after his legacy. He arrived last week, and is now staying with us. Papa has not yet given his consent, but he only wants a little persuasion, for, of course, all reasonable objection to our union is now removed.

I know that I shall be very happy as George's wife. You will like him, I'm sure, when you come to know him; and he is most anxious to make the acquaintance of one who is such a very, very old friend of papa's. I must again ask you to forgive any want of candour I may have shown in accepting, temporarily, your kind and flattering proposal, and withholding from you the fact of my engagement with my cousin. But you *will* forgive me, I know, and will help me to persuade papa to consent to my marriage with George. I hope your cold is better, and that your engagements will soon leave you free to come and see us. Papa wants some one to talk to, for, of course, George is much occupied with me. Pray, take care of yourself, dear Mr. Boger. As papa says, when people have got to a certain time of life, they cannot be too careful. For a cold, he says, there is nothing like a tumblerful of Jamaica rum and hot water, mixed strong, with sugar and a slice of lemon, to be taken the last thing at night, and the first thing in the morning—and throughout the day, as often as the cold is troublesome.

I do trust your housekeeper is still attentive to you. I was at one time inclined to be jealous of her, but of course that's over now. Good-bye. Pray, come and see us soon, and have a long talk with papa.—Always, dear Mr. Boger, your affectionate friend,

“JULIA LUPUS.

“P.S. The many little presents you have so kindly made me from time to time I should like to keep, dear Mr. Boger, if you will permit me, in memory of some happy days, and of a revered old friend. George, I'm sure, will not object. He bids me send you his best respects.—J. L.”

His face white and blank, Boger held the letter in a trembling hand for a moment, then without saying a word, tossed it over to Pettigrew. Pettigrew read it through twice, with his old magisterial air of gravity and deliberation. He waited for a few minutes. There came a humorous twinkle into his eyes; but he was stanch to his friend; he was true to the core; he did not laugh. “Cool!” he said simply. Poor Boger! how much he had admired his Julia's coolness once. “Cool

—infernally cool!” Pettigrew said rather infelicitously.

“Ice!” moaned Boger.

“I pity George,” Pettigrew continued, with a sardonic smile. But Boger looked as though he wanted all the pity his friend could spare.

“Depend upon it, you’ve had an escape, Boger; there’s nothing to regret. You’ve had an escape—in fact, you’ve had more than one escape.”

“I loved her, Pettigrew.” Poor Boger’s eyes filled with tears.

“Better luck next time. There’s more women in the world.”

“There’s no next time, and there’s only one woman—at—at our age, Pettigrew.”

“At our age, Boger,” said Pettigrew with a philosophic sigh, “a man should only be engaged—to dinner. If that’s cold, we can get the cook discharged. If it disagrees with us, perhaps medical art can find us a remedy. You can’t discharge a wife—not generally speaking; and as to that, even physicians are in vain. Let us dine at the Acropolis. We’ll have the best the *chef*

can do for us. We'll toast celibacy in champagne."

"Sour grapes," sighed Boger.

"Not a bit of it—we'll have *Clicquot!*"

Pettigrew had forgotten his *Aesop*.

MR. AND MRS. DOTTRELL.



MR. AND MRS. DOTTRELL.

CHAPTER I.

“ UP-STREET,” HENGEBOROUGH.

“ MR. AND MRS. DOTTRELL had had words.”

Such was the most important, in truth the only news “up-street” Hengeborough; by which fact it may be judged that Hengeborough was not a very lively or eventful place. Affairs of moment were of rare occurrence within its precincts; it was constrained therefore to interest itself in small matters—the domestic disagreements of Mr. and Mrs. Dottrell being necessarily of trifling concern from the stand-point of the

world outside Hengeborough. But just as, according to the proverb, in the kingdom of the blind a one-eyed man is accounted a king, so in a dull and torpid district a very trumpery incident obtains promotion to the rank of an emergency of deep significance. The information that Mr. and Mrs. Dottrell "had had words" was regarded with considerable interest, therefore, received with gratitude, and discussed laboriously and lengthily, "up-street" Hengeborough.

Public sympathy went rather with the husband than with the wife. Dottrell was Hengeborough born, while Mrs. Dottrell came from a distance. People pitied Dottrell, with that cheap kind of pity which is rather unpleasantly adulterated with contempt. They were sorry for him: his domestic troubles were greatly to be regretted. Still it was felt that he had been very much the cause of his own unhappiness. No one could decently affect surprise that Josh Dottrell's marriage had not turned out well. His friends had said from the first that it couldn't be expected to eventuate otherwise. They had even ventured to warn him

of their views in that respect. But they had been treated as prudent advisers and sober well-wishers generally are treated in such matters. Despite all they could say and do, Josh Dottrell had gone his own way—the result was now known to all Hengeborough. He had had words with his wife. With the sequel that seems invariably to succeed the state of having words, Mr. and Mrs. Dottrell, now, did not speak to each other. Words were no longer current coin between them, and they avoided each other's looks. They were like countries that had terminated amicable relations. Communications were suspended between them. They had withdrawn their ambassadors—in this case, their speech and their glances. War had not been absolutely declared, but the chances in favour of the re-establishment of peace did not seem very promising. They stood apart—with their hands behind them. And the gulf of discontent and misunderstanding that divided them seemed to widen more and more as the day went by.

What could Hengeborough do but look on

motionless? Who is to interfere when man and wife fall out? Who will thrust his hand into the hinge of an open door, which may at any moment shut-to violently? It was felt that Mr. and Mrs. Dottrell must be left to themselves. Their division had been of their own contriving. They must come together again of their own accord. It was nobody's business to step in between them and smooth the way to their reunion. And, as all the world knows, what is nobody's business is never done. Mr. and Mrs. Dottrell, therefore, were left to their own devices —to continue their quarrel, or to make peace with each other—just as they might deem best.

Meanwhile, Hengeborough looked on and talked and shook its head: professing to be sorry that such a state of things should have come to pass within its boundaries. Yet it ought to have been grateful, too; even glad. The Dottrells, man and wife, had furnished their neighbours with a topic—indeed, a topic which would bear a good deal of discussion; and topics were not of frequent or rapid growth in Hengeborough. It behoved

people there, when they had gotten hold of one, to make the most of it: because there was no saying for certain when they would get hold of another.

CHAPTER II.

JOSH.

JOSH DOTTRELL, though he was blamed and criticised, though he was accounted to have done an unwise thing in the matter of his marriage, was yet liked and respected in his native place. Possibly his friends regarded him the more favourably inasmuch as he was a sort of living testimony of the accuracy of their prophetic announcements. They had committed themselves to the opinion that his marriage would not be a happy one, and it must be said that their anticipations had been borne out by the facts of the case. Perhaps, had it happened otherwise—had the union of Mr. and Mrs. Dottrell resulted fortunately—Josh's friends might have felt inclined to revenge upon him the falsification of

their presages—at least he would have disappointed them. They might have proclaimed themselves—as people sometimes do in such cases—“agreeably disappointed,” but they would clearly have been convicted of an error of judgment, even if they had not laid themselves open to the charge of giving currency to ill-natured vaticinations. From their point of view, things had happened for the best—or, just as they had predicted they would happen—which meant the same thing so far as Josh’s friends were concerned. It was true that Josh was very miserable. That couldn’t be helped, that was an unavoidable incident of the business; it was a pity certainly, but it was no good dwelling upon it. And then Josh had his friends to rally round and comfort him. They had been his friends before his marriage, and although he had acted directly in opposition to the counsels prompted by their friendship, they were prepared to overlook that—for they were large-hearted and generous people—and were determined to be still his friends quite to the end of the chapter—to the fatal time, indeed, when earthly ties of what-

ever kind should cease to be of any value or utility to poor Josh. They would be true to him, whatever his wife might be. So argued and urged Josh's friends; heedless of the weary, heart-aching expression of his face as he listened, poor fellow, or seemed to listen to them.

Outside his native place, I need, perhaps, hardly say Josh was not a person of much importance. General society had never heard his name, knew nothing of his existence, and would probably have had nothing to say to him had the case been different; but in Hengeborough Josh Dottrell occupied a position to which consequence attached, if only because he was the largest rate-payer in the parish, with the exception, perhaps, of a few farmers holding land quite on the outskirts of the place, and therefore, in strictness, hardly pertaining to Hengeborough at all. Josh was the landlord of the "White Greyhound," a large old-fashioned inn on your right-hand side as you pass "up-street"—a picturesque old building of deep-red brick, with very white window-sashes and ledges, towering stacks of

chimneys, and a high red-tiled roof pleasantly variegated with patches of lichen and velvety tufts of rich green moss. Josh had been many years head-gamekeeper to old Lord Hengeborough, who owned most of the property in the neighbourhood, and a steady and trusty and a trusted and respected servant of that nobleman. With the young lord, however, who succeeded to the property on the death of his father, some years ago, Josh had not got on so well. There was no absolute quarrel between them, as Josh explained, but only "a kind of unpleasantness," which was much the same thing in effect. Josh's management of the preserves had been complained of for the first time in his life. He grieved greatly at the notion that he had ceased to give satisfaction. He complained that the young lord was too much given to "new ideas." Perhaps Josh was arriving at a time of life when new ideas are not received into the mental system without much sacrifice of comfort and complacency. He had saved money. The "White Greyhound" stood empty; he was assured of much patronage and support from the

neighbourhood round; the young lord was prepared to grant him a lease of the premises on liberal terms, and yet without any unhandsome show of eagerness to dispense with his services as gamekeeper, and constrain him into retirement from duty. Josh yielded to the force of these combined circumstances, and entered upon possession of the "White Greyhound," fully resolved to play the part of its landlord to the very best of his ability.

He was at this time a widower. He had been married in early life, but his wife had died childless many years back. When he entered upon his new calling he had been told jocularly by many of his customers that a landlord was no good without a landlady; that the bar-parlour looked unfurnished with no sign of a woman's cap and ribbons to be seen about it; and that it behoved him to look out for a partner as quickly as he might. Josh had put these suggestions from him with a wave of his hand.

He was too old, he said, to marry again; but then, as he was assured, that was nonsense. Men

of greater age than he was were getting married every day. It was true his hair was very grey, but then it had turned grey when he was quite a young man, having been originally of that dense black hue which always seems to lose colour and take to change sooner than any other sort of hair. For the rest, he was hearty enough, stronger and healthier, it might be, than many a younger man. He was sunburnt and weather-beaten—that was none so wonderful, seeing how much of his life had been passed out of doors in a somewhat bleak and exposed country; but there was abundant life in him: it was absurd, his talking of being old. His teeth were as sound, his eyes as keen, his heart as young as any man's; and yet, notwithstanding all these flattering assurances, people now began to call him and to speak of him as "Old Josh;" albeit there was no Young Josh at hand forcing upon him the invidious appellation. The world is so illogical!

How far the things of this kind that were said to him had their effect upon Josh Dottrell, and moved him ultimately to take a step which, in the

first instance, he had positively declared he never would take, it is difficult to decide. One fine morning, however, Hengeborough was startled to hear that Josh Dottrell was really and truly about to get married. And not very long afterwards there was a landlady to be observed occupying and ornamenting by her presence the bar-parlour of the "White Greyhound." Quite a lively sensation pervaded the neighbourhood thereupon.

It was during the interval between the announcement of his intention to marry again and the carrying into effect of that intention, that certain of Josh's friends, to whom allusion has already been made, counselléd him, in their own words, "to think twice about what he was doing," and ventured to predict that evil and not good would come of the course of conduct he proposed to himself. It is true that they might have been among the very people who had previously spoken so plausibly about the slightness of the inroads time had made upon his natural advantages, and the necessity for the presidency of a landlady over the household of the "White Greyhound." They

were not afraid of being taxed with inconsistency, however. When they had denied the fact of his being old, they had simply meant to assert that he was not so very old. When they had, in some measure, suggested the expediency of his taking to himself a wife, they had contemplated his union with a very different kind of woman to her he had chosen to share his home and his fortunes.

They congratulated him, nevertheless. As his friends, that was expected of them; they were bound to do so much; but they did it with a kind of rueful significance, that nipped the flowers of grace from their phrases, leaving them merely the stalks of compliment, as it were; and amongst themselves they quietly proposed a vote of want of confidence in Mrs. Dottrell, and carried it nem. con.

The "White Greyhound" might have stood in need of a landlady, but surely not of such a landlady as Josh Dottrell had been so injudicious as to appoint to that office. A portly person, with an ample frame well adapted for the display of a black satin dress on high days and holidays—

with a beaming eye that could cordially welcome a guest, while it could flash rebuke upon a careless or inattentive underling—with a roseate cheek that was suggestive of choice wines and the glow of the grape—with a hand cunning in the compounding of liquors : that was the kind of landlady Hengelborough had had in contemplation when it was prompting Josh Dottrell to marry. A landlady who knew all about a warming-pan and its advantages—who was possessed with a wholesome horror of unaired sheets—who understood the linen-closet and the kitchen, the wine-cellar and the spirit-stores—who could keep accounts and make out bills—who understood her business and was not above it; the while she could suffuse it with an air of comfort and geniality that gave it attractiveness to customers, and made them forget for awhile that their enjoyments were duly charged, and would have to be paid for ere they quitted the hostelry : such was the kind of helpmate Josh Dottrell should have chosen. But for the wife he had actually brought home and stationed in his bar—peopled tossed their heads and protruded their

chins. They couldn't trust themselves to put into words their opinion of Mrs. Dottrell; but their looks and their manner were certainly not eloquent in her favour.

CHAPTER III.

JAMES BASSETT.

LORD HENGEBOROUGH was the owner of a second estate "down south." Hengeborough people never spoke of it more definitely than that. The nobleman had a third property in the North of England, but with that we have nothing to do. Indeed, with the estate "down south" we have but small concern, after having recorded the fact that Mrs. Dottrell first saw light on his lordship's demesne in that quarter of the country.

During accidental visits to Lord Hengeborough's southern property, with a view probably to comparing notes with the keepers there on the subject of game preserving, Josh Dottrell had become acquainted with one James Bassett, who held a farm of no great extent under his lordship. The

love of sport is almost as levelling as another kind of love is proverbially said to be. And the process of levelling, it is needless to state, has the effect of promoting some men, and, in a way, of lowering others. In the hunting-field, as in the field of battle, all are equal. James Bassett was an enthusiastic sportsman. The right of shooting over his farm was reserved by his landlord, but he had permission to course occasionally, and he hunted regularly in the season, twice, sometimes three times a week. Upon the subject of sport, a subject with endless ramifications, supplying unlimited materials for conversation and discussion, Josh Dottrell and James Bassett found that they had a good deal to say to each other. They became tolerably intimate, although Bassett, the tenant farmer, was in many respects the social superior of Josh Dottrell, Lord Hengeborough's gamekeeper. Josh was often a guest at Bassett's house, and sometimes Bassett journeyed down Hengeborough way and met with a hearty reception at the hands of Josh Dottrell.

If Bassett condescended on the one hand to

make a friend of the gamekeeper, on the other he was pleased enough to claim acquaintance with many of the distinguished sportsmen he encountered in the hunting-field. His skill and prowess, his splendid horsemanship, his never-flagging zeal, and, it should be said also, his pleasant liveliness of disposition and a grace of manner he had acquired, none knew exactly how, had won for him the favourable notice of that veteran Nimrod, the late Lord Hengeborough. People said that his lordship quite spoiled his tenant by the attention he showed him; that it was enough to turn the man's head. His lordship was for ever complimenting and deferring to his tenant. "What does Jem Bassett say?" his lordship would inquire, when there was any division of counsels or difference of opinion in the field. "Follow Jem Bassett, and then you can't go far wrong, and will see some sport, most likely," his lordship would say to juvenile members of the hunt. Then he would admire Jem Bassett's cattle, consult him upon kennel and other sporting questions, invite him to lunch at the great house; humour him and pamper him in all sorts of ways.

Jem was nothing loth. He had aspirations above his station, and tastes beyond his means. In his anxiety to be accounted a gentleman he was apt to forget that he was after all but a tenant farmer. Not that he neglected his land. No one could say that of him. He could have shown his wheat against any man's in the county. He won prizes for his beasts at all the agricultural shows in his neighbourhood. His farm returned him all the profit possible. But as he lived at a rate beyond his income—beyond the income that could anyhow be extracted out of the land he cultivated—it was not so very wonderful that he should one day find himself in difficulties, with no prospect of any direct path out of them. He scarcely looked for one. He made no attempt to reduce his expenditure. To have sold his hunters, for instance, would have compelled him to resign the admiration of his landlord, and the pleasure of being "hail fellow, well met," with all the notabilities of the hunt.

It was thoughtless of Lord Hengeborough, people said. He ought not to have encouraged the extravagant inclinations of his tenant—should

have checked him, and bidden him confine himself to his farm and leave the luxury of sport to those who could afford it. Yet, for all the landlord knew, the tenant might have been possessed of private means—was not wholly dependent upon his farm. And then his lordship was so rich himself, had never once known what it was to want money, that it was difficult for him to comprehend thoroughly the poverty of others. Certainly it never occurred to him that his tenant was living at a rate beyond his income, and that his lordship's praises and compliments had something to do with the ruin of James Bassett.

For James Bassett was ruined. The fact came out at last. It was the talk of the whole country side. His horses and dogs, furniture and farming-stock were all to be brought to the hammer. Everybody pitied, but nobody was surprised. Poor Jim Bassett! The neighbourhood was very proud of him, the while it could not but censure the folly and improvidence of his goings on. He would never be able to hold up his head again, all agreed. There was talk of his emigrating. But it was not

known exactly what he proposed to do. Then came very dreadful news of him. It was an accident, some said. Others took a less charitable view of the matter. James Bassett was found dead one morning in his stable. His gun was by his side. A full charge had entered his brain, and his death must have been instantaneous. It was proved that he had gone out before breakfast with the intention of shooting rats. The report of the gun had been heard within a few minutes of his leaving home. An inquest was held upon his body. The jury's verdict was a merciful one. They decided that the unhappy man had met his death through misadventure.

By his will, made only a week or two before, he bequeathed all such property as he might die possessed of to his only child, Margery Bassett, and appointed his friend, Joshua Dottrell, of Hengenborough, to be sole executor of his will.

END OF VOL. I.

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